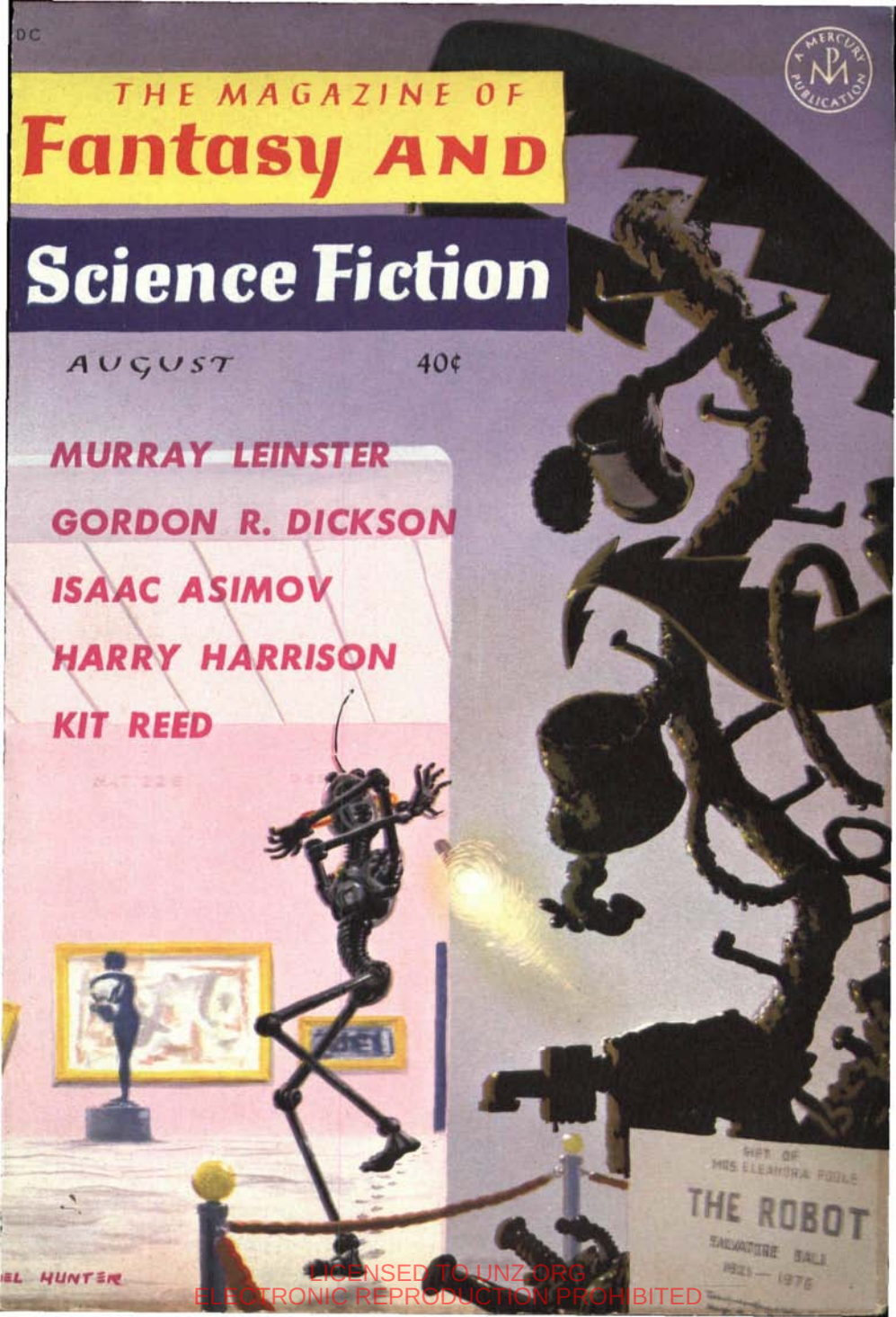

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Fantasy and Science Fiction

AUGUST *Including Venture Science Fiction*

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Cover by Mel Hunter

Joseph W. Ferman, PUBLISHER *Robert P. Mills*, EDITOR

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In this issue . . .

. . . or rather, not in this issue—Alfred Bester's *Books* column, owing to a sudden, unexpected deadline on a script for another medium. Mr. Bester will definitely be back next month. . . .

Those of you who pick up this issue before the ink has quite set will still have time to make the Baycon (the 14th Annual Westercon) at the Hotel Leamington, Oakland, California, on July 1st and 2nd. Guest of Honor: Fritz Leiber. . . .

All professional science fiction writers, we are told, are cordially invited to attend the 6th Annual Milford Science Fiction Writers' Conference, Sept. 11-16. Writers' wives and husbands are welcomed as auditors. For information or reservations, write: Milford S. F. Writers' Conference, Box 337, Milford, Pike Co., Penn.

Coming soon . . .

Another Brian W. Aldiss novelet in the "Hothouse" series . . . articles by Frederik Pohl (on binary digits) and Jay Williams (on interplanetary sex) . . . stories by Herbert Gold, Kurt Vonnegut, Fritz Leiber, Charles Finney, and others.

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Avram Davidson is, of course, known to F&SF readers; his collaborator here is pedagogue, scholar, world traveller, and brother of another (fine) writer in this field—William Tenn. The story concerns, in a way, time travel, and a fraternity house whose exact location—for reasons which will soon be obvious—we are regretfully convinced must be withheld.

THE KAPPA NU NEXUS

by Avram Davidson and Morton Klass

THERE ARE CERTAIN PRINCIples which flourish (to use Addison's felicitous phrase) midst the Crash of Matter and the Wrack of Worlds. Facts, we believe we may safely say, are facts. When the supple and suntanned young woman clad in two (or at most three) wisps of an astonishingly non-opaque material walked out of the closet and into the guest bedroom of the Kappa Nu Fraternity House, the goggling and gaping occupant of the bed—and here we take our stand—was young Hank Gordon.

But how *come?* you ask, and with justice and commendable tenseness. Why would he, now the Biggest of the Big Men on Campus, and an experienced (not to say, polished) womanizer, goggle and gape in such a situation? No matter. We affirm that it was to Hank Gordon's imbecile stare of disbelief—and to no one else's—that the young female person responded with a smile of infinite lubricity as she removed from over her left *mamma* a large name-pin reading *Thaïs,* and tossed it in the direction of the closet shelf.

The pin, that is.

It may also come as a shock to learn of the anti-fraternity statements for which Henry Gordon had been noted in school prior to his successful assault upon the College Entrance Boards. The world is scarcely aware at all that it was he who remarked to the other components of the stag line (Hank? In a stag line? Even so.) on the occasion of the Senior Hop, "Frats? Strictly from Oldsville. Besides, y'think I got rocks? I mean, my old man would flip his

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wig if I asked for more money. Anyway—I mean, like frats? Who needs 'em?"

Thus Henry, pre-college. At other times he had been known to insist that he was going to college to "work hard" (though he did not specify at what, or with what purpose, save it might be to deceive his draft board) and not to "horse around." There are even witnesses to the fact that he accused the entire American fraternity system of being *undemocratic*! We mean, how callow can one get?

Was Voltaire right in saying that the adjective is the enemy of the noun? Properly to understand Hank's inability to make deed jibe with word, we must leave him for the moment struggling to extricate himself from the Kappa Nu guest bedclothes, gazing with wild surmise at the declared sweetheart of wicked Alexandria. Let us go back in time only a few hours, and in space to the bus traversing its customary route between the metropolis (train going no farther) and College Hill.

Here, then, slumped on the seat directly over the rear wheel is Hank Gordon, cynic, iconoclast, freshman-designate. He is no great spectacle—young, callow (see above), as tall as he will ever be, though by no means yet fully formed; dishwater-blond hair, a wide mouth quick to smile, eager, fearful, hopeful, hopeful, lustful. His clothes? Altogether the wrong sort of clothes. Enough about his clothes.

In short a young man with all his parts, though as yet some of them, etcetera, etcetera; and full of what are often called "juices."

Note that we are calling him *Hank*. He had left "Henry" at home, along with six suits of ankle-length underwear. In the unlikely circumstance of a fellow bus rider's asking of him if he still held forth against the frats, he would have stammered a stout affirmative. Most of his mind, however, was engaged in rueing the previous evening: a date with a hometown cocktail waitress whose pelvic structure had long enchanted him. But all the waitress had wanted was to sample the charcoal broil at a different bar.

But, now, frats . . . Hank's position would have not surprised Professor Eamon De V. Mulcahy of the Psych Department (he of the full-grown taste for full-blown women, who was in the near future to trade a more-than-passing-grade for an introduction to Catherine, she of All the Russias). Unhesitatingly, E. D. V. Mulcahy would have pronounced Hank's attitude to be a simple defense mechanism: the young man feared he might not be asked to join a fraternity, and in this not very brave manner he thought to defend himself. It may be. Let us not be quick to criticize him.

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He was very young. We have never been as young as he was.

Then, too, we might with profit turn to the opinions of Professor C. B. Yelg of the Anthro Department on the subject of secret societies (ancient, modern, and primitive) and initiation rites. His rollicking accounts of circum- and sub-incision techniques would alone repay us. But time and space, alas, do not permit. To Hank, again.

Into the town bus station, already half-sunk in the torpors of the night, the dirty floors flecked with cigarette butts and scraps of newspapers, the peeling walls engraved with coarse graffiti, steps our man, laden with suitcases. In his mind at this moment are two hopes: Secondly, that he find a beautiful female freshman (preferably a sex-fiend) who will give him a lift in her automobile; and firstly, that the men's room in the station will be plainly marked, thus saving him the agony of inquiry.

While these two thoughts, each a messy mixture of spiritual and physical, danced in his head like visions of, shall we say, sugar plums, he became cognizant of a figure standing in front of him and saying something or other with every appearance of affability.

This was the almost life-sized Thorwald ("Swede") Thorwaldson, deputed by the brethren of Kappa Nu to go down to the depot and not return without a cargo of human flesh. Recruiting had been bad, had been bad for years and *years*, and although, the Kappa Nu interpretation of what constituted fraternity material was pathetically liberal, this had nothing helped. (The cleverness of the gambit was something less than needle-sharp. It is hardly necessary to point out that neither Rho Gamma nor Beta Tau, nor yet Lamda Mu, ever posted scouts at the bus station—and for the late bus, no less—to greet likely freshmen. No man who didn't drive up in his own car was a likely freshman in the eyes of the Big Three.)

But now something like a fresh wind was beginning to blow through the becobwebbed halls of Kappa Nu. One suspects the fine Italian hand of Pietro Di Guglielmo, this year's president.

"I beg your pardon?" asked Hank, introducing dialogue into these pages as he peered at the figure out of travel-gummed eyes, and let his suitcases find their own way to the floor.

"Said, I was wondering if you'd seen Bill Northrup on the bus?" —Thorwald knowing damned well he hadn't, there being no such person.

"Well, I don't—"

"Tall, good-looking fellow, probably with a letter-sweater," said canny Thorwald.

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"Gee, I don't *think*—but—"

"You must know him: Big Man On Campus," Thorwald proceeded, cunningly.

"Well, um, I've never even seen the campus. I'm *uh* freshman," admitted Hank, producing before the last word in his embarrassment, a glottal stop of a richness which would have delighted Courtney T. Armbruster, sometime Professor of Chaditic, Cushitic, and Hamito-Semitic Languages. (Here let us interrupt the silken-swift flow of our narrative for a respectful pause in memory of Professor Armbruster. A man may depart this mortal vale in many ways, few of them pleasant. For Courtney T. Armbruster, Kismet decreed that he was to be discovered by a highly volatile wife whilst in flagrant delight with Salomé, daughter to Herodias; and how can man die better?) But we are peeping into Volume II again. Our concern should be in Volume I with Thorwald's magnificently simulated astonishment.)

"Really?" the sly Swede exclaimed. "You—a freshman? Why, I certainly would have thought you were an upperclassman!" And to the blushing Gordon he offered his hand and declaimed the Runic syllables of his own name. This young man, Thor thought, promised well: he had only one head, no visible jerks or twitches, one could gaze at his face without shuddering, and his voice gave no indication of palatal cleavage. In all, superior grist for the decrepit Kappa Nu mill.

"He's not on this bus, he won't be in tonight," said the wily soul-snatcher of the mythical Northrup. "Fixed up a room for him at the Kappa Nu House . . . all for nothing . . . " he mused aloud "Shame . . . Say!" A thought struck him, he struck his forehead, and almost staggered. "If you're not expected anywhere else, and this late at night it'd be kind of hard for you to find a place—"

"Meant to take an earlier bus," mumbled Gordon.

"—I mean, kind of irregular, but I can fix it up with the guys, I guess." And so he rattled on, securing one of Hank's suitcases and moving towards the door.

"Well, uh, *yuh,*" said Hank, pleased no end at this totally unexpected offer. "Thank, I mean." Kappa Nu, he was beginning to suspect, gave indication of being so delightfully democratic that he might needs release himself of all rash vows never to join a fraternity.

His victim safely in the car—a stripped-down, souped-up Tortoni-Thung belonging to Tom Schmertz, frat brother, and idiot scion of Schmertz's Cheese, who could be bullied with only moderate difficulty into make the rod available for lodge business—his

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victim safely in the car, to repeat, and the car on its way, Thor confided a bit of news. "Had a little fire at the frat house last week. Staying now in temporary quarters. Just until."

Such deceit, in the face of the dark-rushing, sweet-scented night, was regrettable, and may now be exposed. The chances of Kappa Nu's then rebuilding any structure larger than a three-hole privy were slightly less than those of the Canarsie Indians getting back Manhattan Island.

"Naming no names," Thor observed, in tones hard and putative, "but it wouldn't surprise *me* . . . certain elements . . . jealous of Kappa Nu. Of course," hastily, "no danger *now*. But when we move back *in*— You know how to use a gun?" he shot at Hank.

"Gosh!" breathed Hank, delightedly. "I mean, well, I used to have this Daisy—"

"Good man!" Thorwald gripped his knee. Then he chuckled. "Of course—I know we can trust *you*—fact is, the liquor fed the flames! Damn, but those bottles were well hid! And not just bottles, haw, the Dean raided us twice, but couldn't find a drop—or a dame!"

Note well our dispassionate fairness. In making this last comment Kappa Nu's enterprising representative was not entirely untruthful. He neglected only to mention that the Dean in question had died still deploring the loss to the nation occasioned by the departure from the political scene of the Whig Party, for which he had regularly voted with youthful enthusiasm. Ah, yes! Though currently devoid of so much as a single lizard, not to speak of lions, Kappa Nu, too, had known a time when Jamshyd gloried and drank deep. The cow in the belfry, the skeleton in the chapel, the cane rush, pear-shaped tennis rackets, fringe-topped surreys; and the frat as a body rushing to join the Cadet Corps, hastily formed in '98 to repel the Royal Spanish Fleet from sailing up the Wabash and glutting their vile Iberic lusts upon the local virgins . . . *Ichabod, Ichabod* (or—for we wish to keep nothing from our readers—The glory hath departed).

Exactly *why* the glory had departed, it would be difficult now to say. Thirty years ago Kappa Nu was still, if not top banana on the Grecian tree, at least respectable. Fifteen years ago, however, saw the damage already done, and its so-called house parties were a scorn and a laughter in every sorority (the College itself being non-co-ed) between Marietta, Ohio, and Muscadine, Iowa . . . But of all of this, Hank knew but nothing.

Au contraire. Guns . . . liquor . . . dean-led raids . . .

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women . . . *women!* Hank was all of a delighted tremble.

"Here we are," said Bring-'Em-Back-Alive Thorwaldson as the Tortoni-Thung snarled to a halt in the weed-choked front yard of the *pro tem.* frat-house. He intercepted young Gordon's gaze of dismayed shock and almost fumbled. "You understand this is not permanent. It's just until. Only just until."

Thus, the background, And now we return to Hank, enmeshed in the patched sheets of the bed in what he still thought of, innocently, as "Bill Northrup's room." (Unbeknownst to our man, B. Northrup, mythical bus-rider, was presently the subject of impassioned debate in the Kappa Nu conference room on the floor below. President Di Guglielmo proposed that the inconvenient Northrup be disposed of through a sudden onset of Hodgkin's Disease—which he vaguely thought of as being amorous in origin—whereas Thor Thorwaldson, having developed an affection for this creature of his invention, insisted that Northrup be permitted to run off and join the Foreign Legion.) We are now at the very moment when Thaïs makes her entrance, so let us rummage a bit in Hank Gordon's mind.

It had been quite an evening, Hank was telling himself. All the leading figures of Kappa Nu had shaken him by the hand and assured him that they Had A Great Little Fraternity Here, *videlicet* Sam Swack the Baseball Player (not delineated in his precise position as utility outfielder on the third scrub), Prexy Di Guglielmo as chairman and ranking player of the Checkers Club ("Really creamed the Sarah Stillwell Junior College Team!"), the Tom Schmertz of Schmertz's Cheese aforementioned, and other, lesser, luminaries. They had discussed Sports, Liquor, and Women—though not in that order.

Innocent Hank was not, of course, aware that the less presentable members of Kappa Nu (i.e. most of the members) were being carefully screened from his view. As for the fire which burned out the old frat hutch having been of incendiary origin, ha! a likely story. The antique pile, unpainted since the days when Texas Jack Garner presided over the U. S. Senate, had gone up like a matchhead as a result of defective wiring. The new (or Just Until) longhouse was some distance from the campus, and had been obtained through shenanigans with a local realestatenik which would not bear close scrutiny. Though it had supposedly not been dwelt in for years, the manse-like mass was in a rather good shape. Its exterior flaunted the scars inflicted long years ago by a carpenter who had run amuck with a scroll-

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saw, and its interior was clean enough (though not so clean as it had been before the blood brothers moved in).

Necessary paint, plaster, and wallpaper were far beyond the slender resources of the local's treasury; national, appealed to for aid, indicated that only the high cost of postage prevented revocation of the local's charter. But a sufficiency of the heads of antlered ungulates, splintered oars, triangular banners bearing strange devices, tarnished loving-cups, genuine imitation Heidelberg beer steins, and notices of athletic victories some ten college generations old, plus group photos of turtle-necked young men, and brightly colored pictures of well-endowed young women who—if they existed at all and were not mere lensmen's tricks—ought to have been working for Borden's; a sufficiency of such equipment, we say, had been disposed about the place to give it an air which satisfied Hank's imaginings of what a well-furnished frat house ought to be.

And now the action begins. Thaïs (dark, she was, and looked delicious), you may remember, was smiling lewdly at Hank, Hank was garroting himself with his blanket by way of response. Both we and Hank appear to have too long delayed: the door closes softly behind Thaïs's utterly enchanting haunches.

For yet another moment Hank remained horizontal, reflecting (as it might be academically) that the vision had patently stood in need of neither falsies nor uplifts, nor indeed any such foolish fictions. Then, after first thrashing about and then flinging away blanket and sheet like a finally triumphant Laocoon, he jumped out of bed and in two great leaps bounded to the door. He threw it open and gazed wildly about him.

The hall was empty, unless one be picayune enough to count two frat brothers engaged in conversation on the rickety stair landing down the hall. Sam Swack had just finished doing one of Tom Schmertz's papers, overdue from the previous term, for him; and Tom was laboriously expressing his gratitude and the hope that no suspicion as to authorship would be aroused by the paper's earning more than a C. Sam assured him, heartily, that there was no chance of this.

Both young men looked up as the pajama'd Gordon emerged from the guest room (soon to be his and his alone—well, almost alone—that is, by no means alone, but . . .).

"Did you guys see—?" Hank paused in mid-question. Even in his present fevered state he was capable of a certain minimal amount of ratiocination. An Einstein he was not, but against the Tom Schmertz's of the world

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Hank Gordon at least flickered if he did not shine. It now occurred to him that if they had seen Thaïs they would scarcely be sitting there discussing grades, and if they had *not* seen her, no matter how carefully he construed his question it stood a good chance of getting a bad response.

"Uh, *yuk*," he concluded, with an involuntary and rather nicely Hottentotish click, and withdrew into his bedroom. He closed the door, though not swiftly enough to avoid hearing Sam Swacks exasperated: "One guy, only, to rush—and he turns out to be a sleepwalker! Whatta creepjoint!"

Blushing quietly, Hank walked back to his bed, slowly and automatically wiped off the sole of each foot against the opposite pajama leg, and pensively clambered in.

In a second he was out again. Had he been Lars Porsena, by the nine gods he would have sworn that he *had* seen an attractive and under-dressed young woman saunter out of his closet and through his bedroom door. Being Hank, however, and not Clusium's leading warlord, he could only burble inarticulately, but the point was still the same. In the air of his room there seemed to linger a scent which he thought might be musk. The word *patchouli* glided into Hank's mind, banked, and was gone as he was in the very act of asking himself whether it weren't a game one played with dice.

Walking, oh, ever so cautiously to the closet, he paused, then threw wide the door. Darkness there, and nothing more. He pulled the light cord and was rewarded by the sight of a cross-bar holding four wire-hangers, on one of which was draped his favorite and only drip-dry shirt. Crumpled and forgotten in the corner lay an athletic supporter from which the bloom had long since departed.

Hank reached up and moved a hand around the surface of the closet shelf. He harvested two dead cockroaches and a splinter, but not the slightest trace of a large name-pin carrying the word *Thaïs*.

He tapped the walls, pulled the cross-bar, examined the floor for signs of a trap-door. He backed out, closing the door, and sat heavily on the bed.

"She must be one of those 'dames' Thorwald was talking about: Hidden so the Dean couldn't find her," himself told himself, but not with what you could call real confidence.

Bing! the closet door, and out came *another* member of the female persuasion to meet without flinching Hank's instant exhibition of exophthalmia, or pop-eyes. She was perhaps a trifle more mature than the first visitor, but undeniably unstaled and distinctly

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unwithered. Her eye-lids were painted blue and her palms were tinted with henna. Upon the bit of flimsy fabric which emphasized, rather than concealed, her bosom, was a large name-pin reading *Cleopatra.* This she removed, the action revealing to astonished Hank two small but distinct areas on which he had never till this moment realized that rouge might be applied, and—an imitation of her predecessor—tossed the button back on the closet shelf.

"Heyyy!" cried our eager, impetuous Hank Gordon, leaping still again to his feet and so blundering forward like a dim-sighted giraffe that he bumped boorishly into the lady as she paced her stately way across the floor on tiny, perfectly formed feet.

"Podden *me!*" said she, with a regal hauteur that became her well, and pattered away and out the door with all the imperiousness of a true daughter of a hundred belted Ptolemies.

This time Hank knew better than to follow. He ran to attack the closet instead, but once again it yielded nothing. "It could be part of the fraternity initiation," he whispered, awed at the thought, as even Professor Yelg might be.

Hank sat on the by now well-warmed side of the bed. And as he stared into the open closet he saw, to his infinite consternation, the figure of another woman materialize therein, her charms, alas! to an extent covered by a dress of antique cut; our man was already becoming a connoisseur of apparitions (which was only fair, since he had already done more business in this field than the average member of the Psychic Research Society). Haply and happily, however, the newcomer found it necessary to bend over to adjust her garter, thus revealing the advantages inherent in a neckline so low as to be only a moderately high waistline. What red-blooded American boy would have had the ingratitude to avert his eyes? Just so. Not Hank, either.

Holding up her voluminous skirts and swaying slightly from side to side so that her elaborate headdress trembled a bit, she headed for the door as if she had done this a hundred times before. Hank held out a hand and said, "Uhnk." She ignored this barbaric monosyllable — reminiscent though it is to students of classical Algonkian (who shudder, to a man, at the common mistransliteration: "Ugh")—and evaded his touch, with a comment he (owing to a curious ringing in his ears) did not clearly comprehend. He was able to note only that it had contained the barest hint of a Gallic accent; and *pouf!* she was gone.

The button on *her* bosom had read, *Mme. Pompadour.*

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Thrilled almost beyond his power of containment, baffled and vexed, excited and unfulfilled, Hank stood in the middle of the room, wondering *What the hell?* to beat the band. When he reflected on the beauty of the ladies he had just seen, his heart beat fast. But as he considered the mystery of it all, plus his youth and inexperience, he fell a prey to every variety of despair.

Reader, if you have smiles, prepare to exhibit them now. Hank is at the very nadir; we have nowhere to go but up. At this very moment the door opened—*not* the closet door: no. The *bedroom* door—and in galloped a well-developed cutie dressed in still another variety of ancient mode. On one arm she held a basket of oranges, and so sudden was her entrance that she had made it to the closet door, plucked up from the shelf a button labeled *Nell Gwynn,* and pinned it to her half-laced upper torso before Hank was able to switch on the ignition.

Then, accumulated repressions bursting like over-filled balloons, H. Gordon leaped between Nell and the cross-bar and spread his arms wide. "You aren't going in—not until you tell me what this is all about!"

Nell gave an enchanting little giggle. "Ow, come awn, Ducks," she protested, pushing with her free hand against his chest—or, conceivably, just a bit below it. As Hank—whose ticklishness had been a byword on the local basketball circuit—guffawed and involuntarily relaxed his stance, she lowered her head and charged beneath his left armpit. Instinctively, he seized her by the panniers and swung her about.

The session of free-style wrestling which ensued was not disagreeable to Hank, and Nell's own small squeals of laughter hinted at least a modicum of amusement on her part.

"Coo, my horanges!" she exclaimed at last. "You 'aven't arf spilled them!"

Reluctantly, Hank returned to the matter at issue. "Say, listen here," he said, with that keen mastery of repartee which characterizes the youth of this great republic. There was an annoyed and unappreciative cough, such as could have proceeded only from a throat masculine (lady Soviet athletes perhaps excepted), and, by its sound, at the closet door. Not letting go for a second of the little orange-girl's hand, Hank swiveled.

The man who stepped into his field of vision was undeniably looking harassed. But it was not that which caused Hank's lower jaw to dangle, his brows to rise. Not to keep the facts stored up in our bosoms, the new visitor was wearing a plaid breechclout, heavy side-whiskers, and a thick

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fur boa. Hank, into whose mind had darted, at the first cough, thoughts of janitors and house detectives and deans, was forced to reconsider. Dark though the ways of deans may be, and equally obscure the *mores* of janitors and house-dicks, young Gordon was reasonably certain that none of these classes were represented in his room. Which did not, of course, bring him any closer to the category which *was* represented. Reader, let us steal a march on our man, Gordon. The man in the quasi-Caledonian Bikini was a temporal expediter.

He was also pointing a beringed finger. "What by Hell goes on here?" he demanded, voice thundering from massy chest.

"'Ello, hAngstrom," Nell greeted. "Harsk *'im*—" indicating Hank.

Vainly trying to reassure himself that the visitor was doubtless muscle-bound, Hank gathered himself for battle behind a thrust-out chin and lower lip. After all, there had been Gordons at Drummossie Moor (known to the Sassenachs as Culloden—and may the sod rest heavy on the heavy Duke of Cumberland). "It's *my* room," said this heir of the lawless and turbulent gillies of Gight, with no little truculence—an effect slightly impaired by his next words: "Well, *isn't* it?": ending in a squeak.

Breechclout tugged at a sidewhisker. "True," he conceded; adding, with the air of one quoting, "Occupancing is nine *snurgs* —as indefinite-you said. Have saying? Unperfect tense?" He waved an impatient and glittering hand at syntactic niceties and pushed on. "Still, *we* have were first here. Previous tenantry, and all thus."

The shredded English had Hank gaping again, then a dim light seemed to flicker and he headed for it like a glowworm in sore need of refueling.

"You a Kappa Nu?" he asked, eagerly. It was all so clear to him so suddenly. His frat-brothers-to-be. What a bunch of cards!

Breechclout scowled, and with a large hand pulled his fur-piece tight. Hank noted that the head on it had three eyes. Somewhere in the far reaches of his mind a feverish censor promptly disposed of the notation. "I!" said Fur Boa, loudly. "Me, that are, is Angstrom IV—latelish up-leveled from III —and none of your barbaric epithets!" He thrust his ring-encrusted fist under Hank's nose. "See? Saw? Pleasure to count? Me, that are, is Expediter for MARK-TIME, Incorporealated."

Hank took a step back, colliding with Nell, who at once pinched him and guffawed at his leap. All he could find to say was, "How, how about that?"

Angstrom IV—for so, it would seem, he of breechclout and fur

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boa was officially known—clutched Hank by the arm and led him gently to the bed; Nell, to whom a bed was as the magnetic pole to a lodestone, followed. "I have-will to explain how. But first. Utter promisory. Hele, conceal, and never more reveal. Honor word?"

Gulping somewhat, Hank held up three fingers. "Honor word," he said.

Happily, we are not bound by H. Gordon's oath. Unhappily, we are as birdlimed as you are by Angstrom's garbled grammar. If we have it right, what emerged from his brief lecture was the stuff of dreams itself. He was, he instructed Hank, from the year 831 S.M.—roughly 1200 years from our time, a closer approximation being difficult owing to the Great Timequake—and he expedited diligently for MARK-TIME, Incorporealated, an inter-eon freight and messenger service chartered under the *nids* of the Freemanship of Delaware. The Ninth Century, S.M., it would appear, is going to be an exciting and richly rewarding time to be alive in, if the fact that MARK-TIME was (will be) under contract to PLANETARY PANDERERS, Limitless, is any criterion.

"The motto of PP, me young cock-sparrer," interjected Little Nell, deftly peeling an orange and offering it to Hank, "is, 'Femyles, hany plyce, hany time.' *hAnd* the motto of hold hAngstrom's company is, 'We got the right time.' One 'and washes the hother, see-wot-I-means?" she demanded, and, with a pretty trill of laughter, dug her pretty elbow into Hank's ribs. The skinless citrus fell from his fingers and landed on the floor with a soggy plunk.

"Uh, *yuh!*" said Hank. "I mean —*no!* You mean, these—uh—*pan*derers supply famous beauties to the future from the past? And you really *are* Nell Gwynn, and you're a . . . a . . . that is—" He tried to swallow, it turned into a gulp which almost choked him.

"Ow, yus," said the orange girl, complacently. "Read abaht me in the books, 'ave you? 'Ow the mob thought hI was the King's French doxie, and hI said 'Prithee, good people, hI'm 'is Protestant 'ore,' hand all that clobber." She pushed a stray wisp of hair at the back of her neck, and in a tone of infinite boredom added, "No popery."

Hank ran a distracted hand over his face. That this was no mere jape or masquerade, he was by now well-convinced: Had he not *seen* them appear from—and vanish into— apparently nothing? Still . . . "But—you, and all the others—the women and Angstrom IV—were you born in the past, or in the future?"

Nell clapped her hands and kicked her feet in the air. "Stone the crows, Duckie—hyn't you the

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flipping limit? We was born in *bofe,* hof course! Forgot your *Gundslag's Laws of Time Paradox,* didn't you, love?" She waggled a playful finger under his eagerly twitching nose. "The Union mykes it required reading—" She sat up, suddenly, putting her finger in her rosebud mouth. "Ow! hI *was* forgetting, wasn't hI? You're not *hin* the Union, cockie—"

"No!" burst out Angstrom IV, jumping to his feet, allowing his boa to flap free in his excitement, "But *you* (vocative positively) are in Union, so getting to work? You wish to be wharfed. Piered?" He seemed suddenly uncertain. "Jettied?"

Nell curled her lips at him in splendid Restoration disdain. "Stow it, myte!" she tapped the big insigne on her bosom with triumph. "Long's the Union button's on, hofficially, hI *ham* working. Read the contract. hAnd pippin, 'ere," thumb over her half-bare shoulder (milky-white, it was, and void of spots) into Hank's face; *"e's* the gallant wot 'eld me hup. So you can just dock *'im,* see?"

Angstrom danced wildly on one leg, for so urgent was his desire to express himself that he required the aid of both hands and one foot.

"But you admits he is not *in* Union! Time wastes, midwhile —Charlie Two is making clamor for you, and if we don't clear this nexus, Mary Antonetta will got her head cat—cat? cut—for true-blue this time around. The San Kulaks—" he gabbled, neatly confusing two (or perhaps even three) Revolutions in his haste.

Miss Sunkist of 1665 smoothed her skirts complacently, and twitched her panniered hips. "Now you just leave Charlie to me, hAngstrom," she smiled.

"And if he refuses to give us his head, ah, what?"

Hank, who had picked up some motes of European History on the run between basketball and bathing, said, with a touch of proud severity, "Now, just hold on. It was Charles the *First* whose head was cut off, not—"

But Angstrom waved away this erudition impatiently. "Customer in Arcturus Territory with collective of King Charles's heads. Don't make troubles! Supposed you think the librarian of Alexandria was will burned up, eh. Business, little shot, business: I of the four rings expediting into your past, so—pleasure to get out of way."

Nellie winked. Lust and rage struggled, in Hank, for mastery. The choleric Celtic chromosomes, for the instant, won. He doubled his fists. "Whaddaya mean, 'Get out of way'?" he shrieked. *"It's my room!"*

The man in the plaid breechclout calmed at once, and looked sly. "Cannot, you knew," he whispered, conspiratorially, with a fin-

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ger alongside his nose. "Cannot, that be, go elsewhere. This room, from closet to door, is best nexus between past-future and future-past to be found. Quick, direct, economicful. Also, safe. Copper-bobbies cannot dast disturb this nexus—see case of Ginsburg vs Oligarcny. We go elsewhere and get clapped in vile durance; also, expensic. Further—" He looked at Hank in mild reproach. "—it *were* our room both before and after it were *your* room."

Hank considered this surprise bit of intelligence. "You mean, this room—the house?—used to belong to one of your agents before the frat got it? Well, where *is* he?"

Angstrom sighed, with evident embarrassment. "This one, myself," he said, "has the greatest respectful to all religionry—Brotherness Bond, Thou Art, Gourmandizing, All One, and even have best friend member Sons of Pincus—but moderating in all things, not? We pat—putted: —Fletchworth IV here, and he has offed to become a placed minister of the Auld Licht Kirk in Echlefauchen, Scotia, of your 1823! Damn chap has gone native!"

Nelly, on the bed, had begun to pout. Thought not a beauty, Hank (her expression seemed to say) certainly promised well after all those gouty old kings and flatulent magnates; but if all he was going to do was *talk*, well . . . Then the pout gave way to smile which was almost a grin, and she leaped to her feet, letting fall her fruit. "hI've gottit!" she shrilled. "Wot abaht myking *'im*—" she gestured at Hank—"the nexus hagent?"

The temporal expediter pulled at a side whisker thoughtfully. "Mmmm—forhaps," he said, half-conceding, half-dubious. "But with what we paid? No good to he, Arcurian script, Galactic grumpkins, Delaware nidsdollars . . ."

Nell cast a modest glance downward at the basket of tumbled navels. "Well, naow . . . there's *me* . . . there's the hother gels . . ." She looked up, winked at Hank, whose eyes were getting rounder and rounder and rounder. "We *do* 'ave to pass through 'is room to 'n' from work, carn't avoid that: the nexus. Well, I meantersay—honly polite to stop and natter a bit wif the tenant, wot?"

"Well, and so?" Angie was earnestly considering. "PP Company warrantees the merchandise—"

A loud and irritated pounding at the door interrupted the three of them. It had escaped all their minds that they were not alone in the house, and an annoyed and puzzled committee was now demanding admittance.

"Either he goes or I go!" Sam Swack was heard threatening.

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"It'd be better to have no pledge at all than a sleepwalker who talks to himself a whole damn night—and in three different voices, too!"

"Come on, Gordon!" Thorwald shouted. "Open wide this pearly gate!"

And then it was that inspiration of a rare and radiant sort came to Hank Gordon. "Just a minute, guys!" he yelled, doorwards. He clutched at Angstrom IV's boa.

"What about the rest of the fraternity?" he demanded, in urgent whisper. "I mean, can I let *them* in on The Deal? I mean, it's *my* room, but it's *their* house—"

The noise at the door subsided to a low, spasmodic thumping. Angstrom IV smoothed his fur boa. He consulted his ear-ring watch and listened to it announce the hour and minute in four spatial and four temporal terms. Finally, he capitulated. After all, the business of an expediter is to expedite; Coolidge could have agreed to that.

"All rights," he mumbled. "Girls to visit boys as they are passes through nexus. And we shall make it part of portage and portal pay, so no charge. *But!*" He shook a ringed finger at Hank. "Nobodies else learns where and how and which and whether. Honor word?"

"Honor word," whispered Hank, exchanging a long look with Our Nell. And it is here that we shall leave him.

True enough, because of this brief transaction, the entire football team was to become pledged to Kappa Nu in the course of a single spectacular day and night—and would go on to achieve such fabulous upset victories over Pershing Military Academy, Lake Hopatcong Teacher's Normal, Mizpah Baptist, and Lubavitcher Rabbinical, as very shortly resulted in their being invited to play in a far superior conference. After that the Big 3 was nothing, and Kappa Nu everything. Soon there would be no happier, healthier, or more popular Big Man On Campus (and expert on Restoration Drama)—beloved of student, faculty member, and even trustee—than Hank Gordon; and as a result of endeavors to be made on his behalf by various Kappa Nu Old Grads anxious to participate in certain undergraduate extra-curricular activities, he will be tendered lucrative offers of post-graduation employment by our very largest corporations.

But all this lies, narrationwise, in the not-as-yet, and will not detain us now. Better far to take leave of Hank as he strides towards the reverberating door, a light of pure joy in his heart and eyes, and news—such news—all of a tremble on his lips. He opens the door . . .

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What was there about the unknown planet which had led the enemy to attempt its total destruction . . . ?

SURVIVAL PLANET

by Harry Harrison

"BUT THIS WAR WAS FINISHED years before I was born! How can one torpedo—fired that long ago—still be of any interest?"

Dall the Younger was overly persistent—it was extremely lucky for him that Ship-Commander Lian Stane, both by temperament and experience, had a tremendous reserve of patience.

"It has been fifty years since the Greater Slavocracy was defeated—but that doesn't mean eliminated," Commander Stane said. He looked through the viewport of the ship, seeing ghostlike against the stars the pattern of the empire they had fought so long to destroy. "The Slavocracy expanded unchecked for over a thousand years. Its military defeat didn't finish it, just made the separate worlds accessible to us. We are still in the middle of that reconstruction, guiding them away from a slave economy."

"That I know *all* about," Dall the Younger broke in with a weary sigh. "I've been working on the planets since I came into the force. But what has that got to do with the Mosaic torpedo that we're tracking? There must have been a billion of them made and fired during the war. How can a single one be of interest this much later?"

"If you had read the tech reports," Stane said, pointing to the thumb-thick folder on the chart table, "you would know all about it." This advice was the closest the Commander had ever come to censure. Dall the Younger had the good grace to flush slightly and listen with applied attention.

"The Mosaic torpedo is a weapon of space war, designed to start the uncontrollable cycle of binding energy breakdown in anything it hits. All the torpedoes ever used by either side had mass detectors to defuse them when they approached any object with planetary mass, since the reaction started by a torpedo could just as easily destroy a world as a ship. You can understand our interest when,

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in the last months of the war, we picked up a torpedo fused *only* to detonate a planet. All the data from its computor was filed and recently interpreted. The torpedo was aimed at the fourth planet of the star we are approaching now."

"Anything on the record about this planet?" Dall asked.

"Nothing. It is an unexplored system—as far as we are concerned. But the Greater Slavocracy knew enough about this planet to want to destroy it. We are here to find out why."

Dall the Younger furrowed his brow, chewing at the idea. "Is that the only reason?" he finally asked. "Since we stopped them from wiping out this planet, that would be the end of it, I should think."

"It's thinking like that that shows why you are the low-ranker on this ship," Gunner Arnild snapped as he came in. He had managed to grow old in a very short-lived service. In the process, he had lost his patience for everything except his computors and guns. "Shall I suggest some of the possibilities that have occurred even to me? Firstly—any enemy of the Slavocracy could be a friend of ours. Or conversely, there may be an enemy here that threatens the entire human race, and we may need to set off a Mosaic to finish the job the Slavers started. Then again, the Slavers may have had something here—like a research center—that they would rather have destroyed than let us see. Wouldn't you say that any one of these would make the planet worth investigating?"

"We shall be in the atmosphere within twenty hours," Dall said as he vanished through the lower hatch. "I have to check the lubrication on the drive gears."

"You're too easy on the kid," Gunner Arnild said, staring moodily at the approaching star, already dimmed by the forward filters.

"And you're too hard," Stane told him. "So I guess it evens out. You forget he never fought the Slavers."

Skimming the outer edges of the atmosphere of the fourth planet, the scout ship hurled itself through the measured length of a helical orbit, then fled back into the safety of space while the computer digested and made copies of the camera and detector instrument recordings. The duplicates were stored in a message torp, and only when the torp had started back to base did Commander Stane bother personally to examine the results of their survey.

"We're dispensable now," he said, relaxing. "So the best thing we can do is to drop down and see what we can stir up." Arnild grunted agreement, his index fingers pressing invisible triggers. They leaned over the graphs and photographs spread out on the

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table. Dall peered between their shoulders and flipped through the photographs they tossed aside. He was first to speak.

"Nothing much there, really. Plenty of water, a big island continent—and not much else."

"Nothing else is detectable," Stane added, ticking off the graphs one by one. "No detectable radiation, no large masses of metal either above or below ground, no stored energy. No reason for us to be here."

"But we are," Arnild growled testily. "So let's touch down and find out more first hand. Here's a good spot," he tapped a photograph, then pushed it into the enlarger. "Could be a primitive hut city, people walking around, smoke."

"Those could be sheep in the fields," Dall broke in eagerly. "And boats pulled up on the shore. We'll find out something there."

"I'm sure we will," Commander Stane said. "Strap in for landing."

Lightly and soundlessly the ship fell out of the sky, curving in a gentle arc that terminated at the edge of a grove of tall trees, on a hill above the city. The motors whined to a stop and the ship was silent.

"Report positive on the atmosphere," Dall said, checking off the analyzer dials.

"Stay at the guns, Arnild," Commander Stane said. "Keep us covered, but don't shoot unless I tell you to."

"Or unless you're dead," Arnild said with complete lack of emotion.

"Or unless I'm dead," Stane answered him, in the same toneless voice. "In which case you will assume command."

He and Dall buckled on planet kits, cycled through the lock and sealed it behind them. The air was soft and pleasantly warm, filled with the freshness of growing plants.

"Really smells good after that canned stuff," Dall said.

"You have a great capacity for stating the obvious." Arnild's voice rasped even more than usual when heard through the bone conductor phones. "Can you see what's going on in the village?"

Dall fumbled his binoculars out. Commander Stane had been using his since they left the ship. "Nothing moving," Stane said. "Send an Eye down there."

The Eye whooshed away from the ship and they could follow its slow swing through the village below. There were about a hundred huts, simple pole-and-thatch affairs, and the Eye carefully investigated every one.

"No one there," Arnild said, as he watched the monitor screen. "The animals are gone too, the ones from the aerial pic."

"The people *can't* have vanished," Dall said. "There are empty

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fields in every direction, completely without cover. And I can see smoke from their fires."

"The smoke's there, the people aren't," Arnild said testily. "Walk down and look for yourself."

The Eye lifted up from the village and drifted back towards the ship. It swung around the trees and came to a sudden stop in mid-air.

"Hold it!" Arnild's voice snapped in their ears. "The huts are empty. But there's someone in the tree you're standing next to. About ten metres over your heads!"

Both men controlled a natural reaction to look up. They moved out a bit, where they would be safe from anything dropped from above.

"Far enough," Arnild said. "I'm shifting the Eye for a better look." They could hear the faint drone of the Eye's motors as it changed position.

"It's a girl. Wearing some kind of fur outfit. No weapons that I can see, but some kind of a pouch hanging from her waist. She's just clutching onto the tree with her eyes closed. Looks like she's afraid of falling."

The men on the ground could see her dimly now, a huddled shape against the straight trunk.

"Don't bring the Eye any closer," Commander Stane said. "But turn the speaker on. Hook my phone into the circuit."

"You're plugged in."

"We are friends . . . Come down . . . We will not hurt you." The words boomed down from the floating speaker above their heads.

"She heard it, but maybe she can't understand Speranto," Arnild said. "She just hugged the tree harder while you were talking."

Commander Stane had had a good command of Slaver during the war, he groped in his memory for the words, doing a quick translation. He repeated the same phrase, only this time in the tongue of their defeated enemies.

"That did something, Commander," Arnild reported. "She jumped so hard she almost fell off. Then scooted up a couple of branches higher before she grabbed on again."

"Let me get her down, sir," Dall asked. "I'll take some rope and climb up after her. It's the only way. Like getting a cat out of a tree."

Stane pushed the thought around. "It looks like the best answer," he finally said. "Get the light-weight 200-metre line and the climbing irons out of the ship. Don't take too long, it'll be getting dark soon."

The irons chunked into the wood and Dall climbed carefully up to the lower limbs. Above him the girl stirred and he had a quick glimpse of the white patch of her

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face as she looked down at him. He started climbing again until Arnild's voice snapped at him.

"Hold it! She's climbing higher. Staying above you."

"What'll I do, Commander?" Dall asked, settling himself in the fork of one of the big branches. He felt exhilarated by the climb, his skin tingling slightly with sweat. He snapped open his collar and breathed deeply.

"Keep going. She can't climb any higher than the top of the tree."

The climbing was easier now, the branches smaller and closer together. He went slowly so as not to frighten the girl into a misstep. The ground was out of sight, far below. They were alone in their own world of leaves and swaying boughs, the silver tube of the Eye the only reminder of the watchers from the ship. Dall stopped to tie a loop in the end of the rope, doing it carefully so the knot would hold. For the first time since they had started on this mission he felt as if he was doing a full part. The two old warhorses weren't bad shipmates, but they oppressed him with the years of their experience. But this was something *he* could do best and he whistled softly through his teeth with the thought.

It would have been possible for the girl to have climbed higher, the branches could have held her weight. But for some reason she had retreated out along a branch. Another, close to it, made a perfect handhold, and he shuffled slowly after her.

"No reason to be afraid," he said cheerfully, and smiled. "Just want to get you down safely and back to your friends. Why don't you grab onto this rope?"

The girl just shuddered and backed away. She was young and good to look at, dressed only in a short, fur kilt. Her hair was long, but had been combed and caught back of her head with a thong. The only thing that appeared alien about her was her fear. As he came closer he could see she was drenched with it. Her legs and arms shook with a steady vibration. Her teeth were clamped into her whitened lips and a thin trickle of blood reached to her chin. He hadn't thought it possible that human eyes could have stared so widely, or have been so filled with desperation.

"You don't have to be afraid," he repeated, stopping just out of reach. The branch was thin and springy. If he tried to grab her they might both be bounced off it. He didn't want any accidents to happen now. Slowly pulling the rope from the coil, Dall tied it about his waist, then made a loop around the next branch. Out of the corner of his eye he saw the girl stir and look around wildly.

"Friends!" he said, trying to calm her. He translated it into Slaver, she had seemed to under-

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stand that before. *"Noi'r venn!"*

Her mouth opened wide and her legs contracted. The scream was terrible and more like a dying animal's cry than a human voice. It confused him and he made a desperate grab. It was too late.

She didn't fall. With all her strength she hurled herself from the limb, jumping towards the certain death she preferred to his touch. For a heartbeat she seemed to hang, contorted and fear-crazed, at the apex of her leap, before gravity clutched hold and pulled her crashing down through the leaves. Then Dall was falling too, grabbing for nonexistent handholds.

The safety line he had tied held fast. In a half-daze he worked his way back to the trunk and fumbled loose the knots. With quivering precision he made his way back to the ground. It took a long time and a blanket was drawn over the deformed thing in the grass before he reached it. He didn't have to ask if she was dead.

"I tried to stop her. I did my best." There was a slight touch of shrillness to Dall's voice.

"Of course," Commander Stane told him, as he spread out the contents of the girl's waist pouch. "We were watching with the Eye. There was no way to stop her when she decided to jump."

"No need to talk Slaver to her either—" Arnild said, coming out of the ship. He was going to add something, but he caught Commander Stane's direct look and shut his mouth. Dall saw it too.

"I forgot!" the young man said, looking back and forth at their expressionless faces. "I just remembered she had understood Slaver, I didn't think it would frighten her. It was a mistake maybe, but anyone can make a mistake! I didn't want her to die . . ."

He clamped his trembling jaws shut with an effort, and turned away.

"You better get some food started," Commander Stane told him. As soon as the port had closed he pointed to the girl's body. "Bury her under the trees. I'll help you."

It was a brief meal, none of them were very hungry. Stane sat at the chart table afterward pushing the hard green fruit around with his forefinger. "This is what she was doing in the tree—why she couldn't pull the vanishing act like the others. Picking fruit. She had nothing else in the pouch. Our landing next to the tree and trapping her was pure accident." He glanced at Dall's face, then turned quickly away.

"It's too dark to see now, do we wait for morning?" Arnild asked. He had a hand gun disassembled on the table, adjusting and oiling the parts.

Commander Stane nodded. "It can't do any harm—and it's better than stumbling around in the

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dark. Leave an Eye with an infrared projector and filter over the village and make a recording. Maybe we can find out where they all went."

"I'll stay at the Eye controls," Dall said suddenly. "I'm not . . . sleepy. I might find something out."

The Commander hesitated for a moment, then agreed. "Wake me if you see anything. Otherwise, get us up at dawn."

The night was quiet and nothing moved in the silent village of huts. At first light Commander Stane and Dall walked down the hill, an Eye floating ahead to cover them. Arnild stayed behind in the locked ship, at the controls.

"Over this way, sir," Dall said. "Something I found during the night when I was making sweeps with the Eye."

The pit edges had been softened and rounded by the weather, large trees grew on the slopes. At the bottom, projecting from a pool of water, were the remains of rusted machinery.

"I think they're excavation machines," Dall said. "Though it's hard to tell, they've been down there so long."

The Eye dropped down to the bottom of the pit and nosed close to the wreckage. It sank below the water and emerged after a minute, trailing a wet stream.

"Digging machines, all right," Arnild reported. "Some of them turned over and half buried, like they fell in the hole. And all of them Slaver built."

Commander Stane looked up intently. "Are you sure?" he asked.

Sure as I can read a label."

"Let's get on to the village," the Commander said, chewing thoughtfully at the inside of his cheek.

Dall the Younger discovered where the villagers had gone. It was really no secret, they found out in the first hut they entered. The floor was made of pounded dirt, with a circle of rocks for a fireplace. All the other contents were of the simplest and crudest. Heavy, unfired clay pots, untanned furs, some eating utensils chipped out of hard wood. Dall was poking through a heap of woven mats behind the fireplace when he found the hole.

"Over here, sir!" he called.

The opening was almost a metre in diameter and sank into the ground at an easy angle. The floor of the hole was beaten as hard as the floor of the hut.

"They must be hiding out in there," Commander Stane said. "Flash a light down and see how deep it is."

There was no way to tell. The hole was really a smooth walled tunnel that turned at a sharp angle five metres inside the entrance. The Eye swooped down and hung, humming, above the opening.

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"I took a look in some of the other huts," Arnild said from the ship. "The Eye found a hole like this in every one of them. Want me to take a look inside?"

"Yes, but take it slowly," Commander Stane told him. "If there are people hiding down there we don't want to frighten them more. Drift down and pull back if you find anything."

The humming died as the Eye floated down the tunnel and out of sight.

"Joined another tunnel," Arnild reported. "And now another junction. Getting confused . . . don't know if I can get it back the way I sent it in."

"The Eye is expendable," the Commander told him. "Keep going."

"Must be dense rock around . . . signal is getting weaker and I have a job holding control. A bigger cavern of some sort . . . *wait!* There's someone! Caught a look at a man going into one of the side tunnels."

"Follow him," Stane said.

"Not easy," Arnild said after a moment's silence. "Looks like a dead end. A rock of some kind blocking the tunnel. He must have rolled it back and blocked the passage after he went by. I'll back out . . . *Blast!!*"

"What's wrong?"

"Another rock behind the Eye —they've got it trapped in that hunk of tunnel. Now the screen's dead, and all I can get is an out-of-operation signal!" Arnild sounded exasperated and angry.

"Very neat," Commander Stane said. "They lured it in, trapped it —then probably collapsed the roof of the tunnel. These people are very suspicious of strangers and seem to have a certain efficiency at getting rid of them."

"But *why?*" Dall asked, frankly puzzled, looking around at the crude construction of the hut. "What do these people have that the Slavers could have wanted so badly? It's obvious that the Slavers put a lot of time and effort into trying to dig down there. Did they ever find what they were looking for? Did they try to destroy this planet because they *had* found it —or *hadn't* found it?"

"I wish I knew," Commander Stane said glumly. "It would make my job a lot easier. We'll get a complete report off to HQ—maybe they have some ideas."

On the way back to the ship they noticed the fresh dirt in the grove of trees. There was a raw empty hole where the girl had been buried. The ground had been torn apart and hurled in every direction. There were slash marks on the trunks of the trees, made by sharp blades . . . or giant claws. Something or somebody had come for the girl, dug up her body and vented a burning rage on the ground and the trees. A crushed trail led to an opening between

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the roots of one of the trees. It slanted back and down, its dark mouth as enigmatic and mysterious as the other tunnels.

Before they retired that night, Commander Stane made a double check that the ports were locked and all the alarm circuits activated. He went to bed but didn't sleep. The answer to the problem seemed tantalizingly obvious, hovering just outside his reach. There seemed to be enough facts here to draw a conclusion. But what? He drifted into a fitful doze without finding the answer.

When he awoke the cabin was still dark, and he had the feeling something was terribly wrong. What had awakened him? He groped in his sleep-filled memories. A sigh. A rush of air. It could have been the cycling of the air lock. Fighting down the sudden fear he snapped on the lights and pulled his gun from the bedside rack. Arnild appeared, yawning and blinking in the doorway.

"What's going on?" he asked.

"Get Dall—I think someone came into the ship."

"Gone out is more like it," Arnild snuffed. "Dall's not in his bunk."

"What!"

He ran to the control room. The alarm circuit had been turned off. There was a piece of paper on the control console. The Commander grabbed it up and read the single word written on it. He gaped as comprehension struck him, then crushed the paper in his convulsive fist.

"The fool!" he shouted. "The damned young fool! Break out an Eye. No, two! I'll work the duplicate controls!"

"But what's happened?" Arnild gaped. "What's young Dall done?"

"Gone underground. Into the tunnels. We have to stop him!"

Dall was nowhere in sight, but the lip of the tunnel under the trees was freshly crumbled.

"I'll take an Eye down there," Commander Stane said. "You take another one down the next nearest entrance. Use the speakers. Tell them that we are friends, in Slaver."

"But—you saw what reaction the girl had when Dall told her that." Arnild was puzzled, confused.

"I know what happened," Stane snapped. "But what other choice do we have? Now get on with it!"

Arnild started to ask another question, but the huddled intensity of the Commander at the controls changed his mind. He sent his own Eye rocketing towards the village.

If the people hiding in the maze of tunnels heard the message, they certainly didn't believe it. One Eye was trapped in a dead-end tunnel when the opening behind it suddenly filled with soft dirt. Commander Stane tried nosing

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the machine through the dirt, but it was firmly trapped and held. He could hear thumpings and digging as more dirt was piled on top.

Arnild's Eye found a large underground chamber, filled with huddled and frightened sheep. There were none of the natives there. On the way out of this cavern the Eye was trapped under a fall of rocks.

In the end, Commander Stane admitted defeat. "It's up to them now, we can't change the end one way or another."

"Something moving in the grove of trees, Commander," Arnild said sharply. "Caught it on the detector, but it's gone now."

They went out hesitantly with their guns pointed, under a reddened dawn sky. They went, half-knowing what they would find, but fearful to admit it aloud while they could still hope.

Of course there was no hope. Dall the Younger's body lay near the tunnel mouth, out of which it had been pushed. The red dawn glinted from red blood. He had died terribly.

"They're fiends! Animals!" Arnild shouted. "To do that to a man who only wanted to help them. Broke his arms and legs, scratched away most of his skin. His face—nothing left . . ." The aging gunner choked out a sound that was half gasp, half sob. "They ought to be bombed out, blown up! Like the Slavers started . . ." He met the Commander's burning stare and fell silent.

"That's probably just how the Slavers felt," Stane said. "Don't you understand what happened here?"

Arnild shook his head dumbly.

"Dall had a glimpse of the truth. Only he thought it was possible to change things. But at least he knew what the danger was. He went because he felt guilty for the girl's death. That was why he left the note with the word *slaves* on it, in case he didn't come back."

"It's really quite simple," he said wearily, leaning back against a tree. "Only we were looking for something more complex and technical. When it wasn't really a physical problem, but a social one we were facing. This was a Slaver planet, set up and organized by the Slavers to fit their special needs."

"What?" Arnild asked, still confused.

"Slaves. They were constantly expanding, and you know that their style of warfare was expensive on manpower. They needed steady sources of supply and must have created them. This planet was one answer. Made to order in a way. A single, lightly forested continent, with few places for the people to hide when the slave ships came. They planted a nucleus, gave the people simple and sufficient sources of food, but absolutely no

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technology. Then went away to let them breed. Every few years they would come back, take as many slaves as they needed, and leave the others to replenish the stock. Only they reckoned without one thing."

Arnild's numbness was wearing off. He understood now.

"The adaptability of mankind," he said.

"Of course. The ability—given enough time—to adapt to almost any extreme of environment. This is a perfect example. A cut-off population with no history, no written language—just the desire to survive. Every few years unspeakable creatures drop out of the sky and steal their children. They try running away, but there is no place to run. They build boats, but there is no place to sail to. Nothing works . . ."

"Until one bright boy digs a hole, covers it up and hides his family in it. And finds out it works."

"The beginning," Commander Stane nodded. "The idea spreads, the tunnels get deeper and more elaborate when the Slavers try to dig them out. Until the slaves finally win. This was probably the first planet to rebel successfully against the Greater Slavocracy. They couldn't be dug out. Poison gas would just kill them and they had no value dead. Machines sent after them were trapped like our Eyes. And men who were foolish enough to go down . . ." He couldn't finish the sentence, Dall's body was stronger evidence than words could ever be.

"But the hatred?" Arnild asked. "The way the girl killed herself rather than be taken."

"The tunnels became a religion," Stane told him. "They had to be, to be kept in operation and repair during the long gap of years between visits by the Slavers. The children had to be taught that the demons come from the skies and salvation lies below. The opposite of the old Earth religions. Hatred and fear were implanted so everyone, no matter how young, would know what to do if a ship appeared. There must be entrances everywhere. Seconds after a ship is sighted the population can vanish underground. They knew we were Slavers since only demons come from the sky.

"Dall must have guessed part of this. Only he thought he could reason with them, explain that the Slavers were gone and that they didn't have to hide any more. That good men come from the skies. But that's heresy, and by itself would be enough to get him killed. If they ever bothered to listen."

They were gentle when they carried Dall the Younger back to his ship.

"It'll be a job trying to convince these people of the truth." They paused for a moment to rest. "I still don't understand though, why

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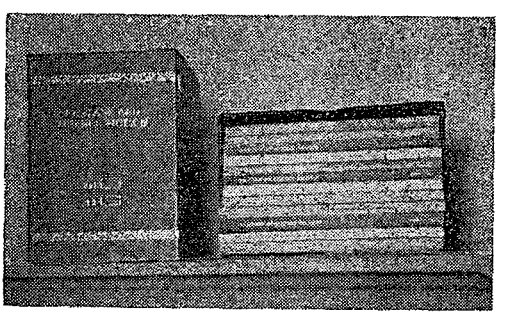
the Slavers wanted to blow the planet up."

"There too, we were looking for too complex a motive," Commander Stane said. "Why does a conquering army blow up buildings and destroy monuments when it is forced to retreat? Just frustration and anger, old human emotions. If I can't have it, you can't either. This planet must have annoyed the Slavers for years. A successful rebellion that they couldn't put down. They kept trying to capture the rebels since they were incapable of admitting defeat at the hands of slaves. When they knew their war was lost, destruction of this planet was a happy vent for their emotions. I noticed you feeling the same way yourself when you saw Dall's body. It's a human reaction."

They were both old soldiers, so they didn't show their emotions too much when they put Dall's corpse into the special chamber and readied the ship for takeoff.

But they were old men as well, much older since they had come to this planet, and they moved now with old men's stiffness.



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Another persuasive example of the varied talents of young Vance Aandahl . . .

COGI DROVE HIS CAR THROUGH HELL

by Vance Aandahl

My friend Cogi was lying in the grass and chewing on a twig.

"You should come to the station. I've been playing poker with some great big hoods."

I looked at his great, greasy mane of black hair, which curled from the top of his white forehead to the base of his neck. It seemed almost to mingle with the grass and take root.

I said, "Okay," smiling at his monstrous, grass-framed body. He arose slowly and stood unsteadily, stretching his arms. A marvelous smile, like that of a squirrel's, spread across his pasty face. Indeed, Cogi's entire physical structure was marvelous: sprouting from a towering body of jolly pink flesh was a perfectly globular head. His body was very nearly the body of a thyroid giant; but his head was the head of an intellectual, with protruding frontal lobes and gentle, lucid eyes hidden behind thick glasses. From his appearance alone, one could see that Cogi was a creature of conflicts.

I picked up my guitar and we walked across the grass to Cogi's car. It was a 1950 Mercury, old and battered, which Cogi had bought several years ago. Most of its black paint had rusted away and its seat covers had been torn, as Cogi said, "by the teeth of hundreds of squirrels." But the innards of the car, its engine, its soul, had been renovated. Cogi's hands had not introduced a new engine, a foreign body; rather, he had fondled the car's own engine until its youth had been restored. To Cogi, the car was an entity, a living being which he had returned to health. Yet its outward appearance meant nothing to him; only the heart of the car was significant.

Now Cogi sat on the tattered seat covers, stroking the wheel before him; I sat beside him. The

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warm afternoon sun was in our faces, and we were drowsily reluctant to go. Finally, I began to pluck the strings of my guitar. With the smooth purr of a jungle cat, Cogi's car wheeled away from the curb.

"These big hoods I told you about—they're members of a gang called the Stone Street Panthers. They wear baby-pink jackets and powder-blue trousers. All of them have pink and blue motorcycles."

I smiled.

"Yesterday, they came into the station for gas. We ended up playing poker. I won, so they'll be back today."

"I think you're feeding me a big hunk," I said.

"If you don't believe me, you can get out of the car right now," said Cogi, smiling like a squirrel, while the car idled at an intersection. But I didn't get out, partly because it was all a joke, and partly, I think, because I actually did believe him.

We soon entered the city's Negro district, a place of decrepit tenements and ancient maple trees. Nowhere was there grass; the afternoon sun set the dust on fire and coppered the skin of little children. We eventually came to a place where five streets met, called Five Points, where there were a great many bars and hotels, a few grocery stores, and a taxi-cab garage. Near the edge of this place, beneath a huge maple tree, we came to Cogi's dusty gas station.

We walked past Cogi's jeep, murmured hello to the foul-mouthed, white-pated attendant, whom Cogi had hired many years ago and whose name nobody knew, and then relaxed inside the station on the two green chairs, which had been scratched, as Cogi said, "by the teeth of hundreds of squirrels." There, shuffling cards and looking at the expanse of Five Points through a wide window, we talked.

"There's something I like about this place," said Cogi.

"Five Points?"

"Not just the buildings. The people. The dust. The trees. The way it rains."

"How does it rain?"

"A big purple cloud comes jumbling over and a black wind whooshes along the sidewalk and a colorless rain skitters down and all the people run for shelter."

"I'd write a song about it if I knew what you were talking about."

"Oh, Zaba! Just shut up, will you?"

"Sometimes I wish I lived down here. Or worked here, like you. I'm always writing songs about it . . ."

Then I realized that Cogi was outside the station, rolling up his sleeves, smiling like a squirrel, gazing at a customer's car. I

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watched him as he went to work, lifting up the shining hood, sinking his hands into the metalled innards, chattering all the while to the driver. The sinking sun turned the whole scene crimson: here was the young Greek Cogi, giant body shimmering, black hair flaming, as he hunched over the blood-red Lybian chariot, while the distant Roman rumblings were unheard in Carthage, while the squirrels jumped from tree to tree and the great black warriors laughed quietly. Then the image wavered and disappeared, and only jolly Cogi and a Negro's car remained. Somehow, though, when the car drove away, it seemed to move as though it were drawn by some great animal.

When he came back, Cogi giggled.

"What's so funny?"

"That man—he said that the Devil's been fouling up his car."

"Yeah?"

"Yeah." Cogi paused. "You know . . ."

I laughed softly, but my laughter was met only by pink, squirrel-like eyes.

We soon began to play poker: turbulent Spit in the Ocean, unnerving Seven Card Stud, spiritless Five Card Draw. Dollar chips tumbled onto the ancient table, which had been gnawed, as Cogi said, "by the teeth of hundreds of squirrels," while the skirling nightsong of Five Points sprang up in the death throes of the bloody sunset. Neon lights flickered, turned the sidewalks white and yellow and red and blue, and then coursed like fire through my veins: down fell the dollar chips, down fell the cards (which had been dog-eared, as Cogi said, "by the teeth of hundreds of squirrels"), and suddenly I found myself resting against the outside wall of the station, my singing guitar in my hands, while Cogi talked with a white-haired Negro elder.

"Rassemas."

"Cogi."

"How have you been, Rassemas?"

"Can't complain too much. My boy almost broke his toe getting on the bus the other day; he came home early and I looked at his toe and I said, 'Brother! Oh, brother!' "

"Hurt himself bad?"

"His toe is big and fat. Been bleeding, too. I guess the Devil is just out to give us folks trouble."

"Hmmm."

Black night hung dismally over the twinkling neon lights of Five Points; dark shadows crept into the tenements, and all the people came out onto the streets, under the hot lights, where the chatterings of squirrels drifted down from the trees. Watching their revelry, their happiness, their ecstasy of togetherness, I suddenly was alone.

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I looked at Cogi, the ugly Cogi, the Cogi at whom white people laughed, the lonely Cogi; he was surrounded now, surrounded by great, handsome, smiling, black friends. He sat on the fender of his beloved car and talked quietly, while in the darkness the squirrels chattered. But still—he was lonely. I, too, was lonely; and I, too, suddenly wanted the friendship of these ebony people.

Cogi came and sat beside me.

"Did you ever notice, have you ever seen, that squirrels always stay on the opposite side of a tree trunk when you walk by? When any white man walks by? Did you ever notice the squirrels down here? Have you, Zaba? It's different."

I laughed at him, quietly, reverently, peering into the soft squirrel eyes that would save me.

"Everything's different. I've tried, but I'm caught in between. I can't throw off my white husk. For ten years I've worked in the heart of it, but still I'm not a part of it. What's the answer, Zaba?"

"I don't know." I sighed.

"The squirrels. The car. But not them, not the people, not the heart of it. I can't penetrate the core. I can't."

Into our abstraction came an image. The image of a child, a running black blur of coffee beans, a stumbling bundle of cheap laundry; the image of a small black face smeared with candy and nosedrip and tears—tears like beads of frosted glass; the image of a tiny black hand darting out once, falling back, and then stretching out again, reaching tentatively for Cogi.

"Devil threw a rock at me, Mr. Cogi!"

His great black mane curling down the nape of his neck, his glasses falling from his face as he stood up, Cogi, this giant concoction of misformed flesh, arose, lifted into his arms the squirming, tear-stained child, held the child tight until his own face was covered with candy and nosedrip and tears, stood in the silent night, surrounded by neon lights and chattering squirrels, stood and wept.

Then he roared and sang and called to the squirrels. Then the rusty black car was moving, and people were jumping into the car and onto it, and the squirrels were swarming over it, and I was inside it, sitting next to Cogi, strumming my guitar; my body was crushed by flesh, my clothes were torn, as Cogi said, "by the teeth of hundreds of squirrels"; Cogi roared and sang, and the car moved into a dark street, into a dark alley, into the darkness . . .

I awoke with the fresh morning sun hot on my face. It was the light of Heaven: I was content to remain motionless, letting the

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light penetrate my eyelids and flood my eyes with soft gold. Then something trickled warmly into my armpit. I lifted myself slowly to a sitting position, opened my eyes with agonizing care, and rested my forehead on my updrawn knees. I was enveloped in a masochistic ecstasy of aching muscles. I touched my head; the brains seemed ready to burst from my skull. The warm trickle that had wakened me was blood.

Inside the station, I washed myself with cold water from a filthy faucet. I sat quietly on one of the green chairs for several minutes, contemplating the taste of acid in my mouth. Then I walked out of the station and into the alley where I had awakened. Cogi was lying there. Cogi, with a delicate spatter of blood across his forehead: it looked like fragile black lace, stretched from his nondescript nose to the very roots of his hair. Such hair! Dishevelled now, it stretched like dark seaweed, lying in thick curls on the hot cement. It rested under the back of his neck like a pillow. It flowed over his shoulders like a shawl.

"Cogi," I said. "Cogi, Cogi." I went into the station, filled a broken ash tray with water, returned to the alley, and tried to wash away the blood. When I had smeared it into a wide, crimson stain, Cogi awoke.

"Hell, Zaba. Hell."

"Hell," I whispered. "That's it." I forgot about Cogi, stumbled back into the station, and sat once more in the green chair. "We went to Hell. Cogi and I and the Negroes and the squirrels and the black car. We went to Hell."

Cogi shuffled into the station. His wound, which must have been in his scalp, had opened again; fresh blood was dripping down his forehead and off his nose.

"Cogi. We went to Hell."

Cogi walked mutely to the yellowed mirror and combed his hair. Then he sat down in the other green chair, while the blood dripped constantly off his nose.

"We went to Hell."

"You're telling me."

"No, Cogi! We went to *Hell!*"

"Oh."

"We went to Hell."

"Hmmm."

"The three-headed dog and the oily coils of the Styx and the howling Furies! Cogi, I'll write a song about it! The Devil, Cogi!"

Cogi nodded his head silently. I leaped up, rushed about the room, found my guitar in the rest room, and rushed back to the green chair. I fondled the glittering strings, tilted my head back, and sang.

"Cogi drove his car through Hell,
Cogi gave the Devil hell,
Cogi faced the roaring flames,
Cogi called the Devil names!"

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I looked desperately at Cogi. His squirrel eyes were blurred. He licked his thick lips with a swollen tongue. He got up and combed his hair. Then he went into the rest room and washed the blood off his face.

I walked to the window. Five Points was very quiet at dawn. Several blocks away, a single old man was limping along the sidewalk; otherwise, there was nothing moving but the clouds. They drifted slowly across the sky, tinted silver gray by the sun. I rested my guitar in the corner and went back to the green chair.

Presently Cogi returned. We pulled our chairs up to the ancient table, which had been gnawed, as it now seemed, by nothing but the elements. Cogi's eyes were no longer the eyes of a squirrel; they were carbuncles. The dismal oppression of a hangover hung over us.

"Tell me more about Hell."

"Shut up."

"Oh, Zaba. Everybody gets drunk. Don't feel bad about it."

"It was beautiful, Cogi. It really did happen, in a sense. I believed it."

"Hmm."

"Hell."

The morning sunlight poured through the back door and onto Cogi's cheek like downy fire. I looked out the window.

"Let's go get some coffee. My head feels like a jar of dirt."

"I know how you feel, Zaba."

I felt lonely and disappointed.

As we walked out of the station, the cries of the squirrels were like stones thrown at my head. The magical purr of the black car was harsh in my ears. I rubbed my back against the seat covers; they were tattered, as it now seemed, by nothing but the elements.

There was a cafe only a block away. The waitress smiled happily as she recognized Cogi.

"Hello, Mr. Cogi."

"Hello, Janie," said Cogi. "Two coffees."

"Okay, Mr. Cogi. Isn't it a beautiful day?"

We looked out the window. The sun was higher now. It was met by a silvery cloud and obscured. We watched. Then the sun burst through the misty fringe of the cloud and rose above it, pouring golden light across its billows, through the sky, into the cafe, and onto our faces.

"It is," said Cogi suddenly. "It's a beautiful day."

Just then, Rassemas, the Negro elder, entered the cafe.

"Cogi."

"Rassemas."

"How you been, Cogi?"

"Aaaaaggghhh!" Cogi grasped his head in mock anguish.

"Poor Cogi. I'm doing better, myself. My boy got well."

"Got well?" I asked.

"Last night his toe was purple

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and fat. This morning it looks good as new."

"Good as new?" asked Cogi.

"Good as new. Devil ain't gonna bother him any more."

I felt better when we walked out of the cafe into the sunshine. The black car did not bother me now, nor did the chattering of the squirrels. A pink, squirrel-like glimmer returned to Cogi's eyes.

A small boy was standing outside the station. His face was scrubbed clean and he was wearing a suit. When he smiled, his white teeth gleamed. I was not sure whether or not he was the same boy who had come running to us during the previous night.

"Mr. Cogi! Look at me!"

Cogi picked him up and put him on one gigantic knee. I went into the station, found my guitar, and came out again. Just then, twenty feet away, a car stopped on the street. A grinning black face appeared in the window.

"Car's running fine, Cogi! Devil ain't gonna give my car any more trouble. You fixed her up just fine!"

"Yes, sir!" said the little boy.

The morning sun was far above the clouds now. It glowed on the whole expanse of Five Points, on the black car, on the backs of the chattering squirrels far above, on Cogi and the little boy, and on myself. Basking in the sun, I suddenly realized that I was no longer lonely. Nor was Cogi; looking into his eyes, I saw only contentment. I began to strum my guitar . . .

"Cogi drove his car through Hell,
Cogi gave the Devil hell,
Cogi faced the roaring flames,
Cogi called the Devil names!"

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The number of interesting things Damon Knight finds in French for F&SF both delights and dismays us—the dismay coming from a conviction that there must be a large supply of fine fantasy and science fiction in other languages which we are missing. Suggestions anyone?

JULIETTE

by Claude F. Cheinisse

(translated by Damon Knight)

AVIDLY, WHEN THE LAST PATIENT was gone, I lit my first cigarette of the day. All around me, interns and externs were getting up with a great hubbub. While I was putting on my jacket, someone came up and handed me a few final papers to sign; then I walked down an endless hall and passed the doorman, an ancient gold-braided wreck, decorated in the war of 1970. I had to answer him patiently once more that, yes, the weather was clearing, no, they still didn't know how to graft on an artificial arm, yes, the Doctor was very tired from his morning's consultation. At last I got out onto the steps, and as it did every day, my exhaustion vanished all at once: Juliette was waiting for me.

She was unaware of the envious looks of passing students, who were examining her contours minutely without even trying to be surreptitious about it; the boldest ones whistled with admiration. She had eyes for nothing but the door where I was about to appear. As soon as I passed through the impalpable curtain which barred the hospital entrance to microbes and unwanted visitors, Juliette started her engine and opened the door.

I sat down in the passenger's seat with a sigh of relief. Juliette closed the door, pulled away gracefully, swerved to frighten an extern she didn't like, and headed toward the restaurant, all without saying a word: she always respected the numb silence of my first few minutes. It was only after two red lights that she offered me a lit cigarette and asked tenderly, "Tired?"

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My silence was an answer, and I knew she wouldn't be offended.

I let myself sink into a delicious idleness, compounded of English tobacco and Juliette's perfume. Three blocks farther down, a taxi cut into us from the left, and Juliette assumed her most strident voice to yell frightful things at him, which brought me back to earth.

Anyhow, we were almost at the restaurant. Juliette turned into the private drive which led to it, chose a shaded table surrounded by flowers, and when the waiter ran up, ordered a medium rare steak for me, and twenty liters and a grease job for herself.

My affair with Juliette dated from three years back. At the first glimpse, I'd fallen violently in love with her—taken out my checkbook, and without the slightest regret traded in a Citroën that had no personality—a good driver, but incapable of expressing any emotion, or carrying on a conversation outside her own sphere. Juliette herself took a long time to lose her shyness, to consider me as her friend rather than her master. She never talked much about it, but I think she had been very unhappy before coming with me: half broken in, hardly out of the factory in Milan, she had been turned over to a destetable ape who never let her drive herself, always insisted on holding the wheel himself—and the way he did it . . . As soon as she realized what she meant to me, our understanding was complete. By unspoken agreement, we didn't talk much about her past: I'm not one of these jealous types who insist on breaking in a car themselves and can't stand not to be the first owner; but at the same time, I don't like to think about anyone else driving Juliette.

The steak and the grease job were followed by a grapefruit and a wash, then by a good cup of coffee and a timing adjustment. To tease Juliette, I pretended to be interested in the lines of a Jaguar that came into the restaurant. Dignified, she ignored this treachery.

On the way back, at the turnpike exit, just before the sharp turn that overlooks the Seine, a new Dodge passed us going full speed.

Juliette said only, in a very soft voice, "Beginner . . ." and slowed up. Two seconds later, the tail-lights of the Dodge blinked on ahead of us—she was very close to the edge of the turn, forced to brake suddenly. Juliette twisted smoothly past her. Then she said, "She's young . . ." and laughed contentedly.

She liked to make a point of her experience, even while groaning sometimes (I didn't take her very seriously) about her advancing age and the imaginary slowing down of her reflexes.

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Between my laboratory and my course at the University, the afternoon passed as usual. When I left the amphitheater, Juliette was there. I was tired, and especially worn out by the hundred snickering students who had pretended to listen to me. Juliette knew or sensed it, grew very gentle—without being asked, she took the way to a scenic route that we loved, and once there, asked quietly, "Do you want to drive?"

In a moment I was in the driver's seat; the wheel rose toward me; Juliette was offering herself. . . . We followed the scenic route lovingly, one guiding the other, one in the other, feeling the same joy at each rhythmic turn, at each acceleration when the motor's thunder roared. . . . Toward the end, I relaxed my grip a little, only half steering her, leaving her almost free in her movements, attentive to the soft moans of her tires in the final turns. . . .

We were feeling calm again by the time we got back to the highway. I slid over into the passenger's seat; with a joyful heart, I lit a cigarette and unfolded my paper. Juliette was humming gaily. Before dinner, we went to pick up Josiane (the week before, it had been Christiane. A little earlier, Veronique. Before that . . . I don't remember. They're so much alike . . . all I ask of them is to be pretty, a bit dumb, and willing). And on the way back, when I put my arm around the girl's shoulders and began to nibble sweet nothings into her ear, I knew by the faint interruptions in the purring of the motor that Juliette was laughing, very quietly, to herself.

Juliette and I went home to bed about one in the morning, light and relaxed, whistling together. Not for a moment did I imagine this could be our last day of happiness.

In the middle of the night, the telephone woke me: an emergency. I got dressed, grumbling, turned the dispenser dial to "coffee" and poured myself a big cup, then went down to the garage. Juliette was asleep, her brain disconnected. I called her: she switched on her wake-up current immediately. I heard the starter's whine, but the sound of the motor didn't follow. A second try, then a third had no more effect. In a timid little voice, Juliette said, "Excuse me . . ." I reassured her quickly, called a taxi, then the mechanic.

It was her first failure since the time we met.

The taxi came: he smelled of wet pipes and cold dogs . . . He refused to wait for me, and I had to walk back. There was a light in the garage—the mechanic was using his stethoscope on Juliette. I went upstairs without disturbing them, and had a warm bath, a hot cup of coffee and a book.

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In the morning, Juliette didn't want to talk to me. It took the hint of a badly-controlled skid, on the wet pavement, to make her whisper, "I'm getting old. . . ."

"You're not going to start that foolishness again, are you?"

But, a little farther on, she who never made a mistake missed the new do-not-enter signal at the corner of the boulevard. A whistle nailed us to the spot: luckily, it was a man-cop, accessible to certain arguments . . . Juliette assumed her lawbreaking voice, so sensual and full of promises that it always made me a little jealous. A minute later, we were released, with a somewhat shaky "And don't do it again." That cop would have beautiful dreams tonight.

I tried to suggest a little overhaul in Milan: I could perfectly well take cabs for a month. But Juliette did not answer. She left me in front of the hospital steps without a word, and went off without telling me where she was going.

At noon, she was there waiting for me, and for a moment I could have believed that everything would be the way it had been yesterday, every day—that it had been just a matter of a general overhaul. She offered me a lighted cigarette, hurled herself at the back of the extern she didn't like, asked me in her soft voice, "Tired?" without expecting an answer.

But she braked to draw up in front of the agency where we had met, three years ago. The owner was waiting for us, and with a pang of sorrow I realized where she had been all morning.

I tried to argue with her, but she only said, "I'm tired . . ." She had already made all the arrangements, all it needed was my signature. The New One, shining in all her chrome, was apprehensively quiet. She was new, I would have to break her in.

The salesman tried to talk to me about the "trade-in on the old model," but I interrupted him, almost shouting: "No, I don't want us to separate, Juliette's going to stay with me. I—I'll use her in the evenings, or Sundays. I don't want anybody to tire her out any more, she has the right to get some rest."

The salesman looked at me rather pityingly. "It's nothing but a machine, Doctor. A beautiful machine."

But I remained very firm: I wouldn't sell Juliette. Besides, she backed me up: she said in an absent tone: "That's it, the evenings —or Sundays. . . ."

She was the one who wanted me to leave right away with the Replacement, to get acquainted with her. She promised me to go quietly back to the garage. When I leaned over to get my portfolio from the back seat, she used her law-breaking voice to say to me,

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"So long, darling . . ." She had never spoken to me that way, had never even used that voice with me. I meant to tell her of all my affection, promise her again how many fine vacations we'd have, and fine spins along the scenic routes . . . but she was already gone.

When I arrived at the laboratory with the Intruder, toward the beginning of the afternoon, an automatic cop was waiting for me. As soon as I saw that long black and white cylinder, tapered like a torpedo, balancing on its two wheels in front of the door, I knew.

I hardly heard its report, recited in the neuter, official voice of those stupid machines. A few scraps of phrases whirled in the depths of my despair: ". . . gave chase, but . . . too fast . . . the turn. . . ."

I had to keep up appearances, above all in front of a cop, human or not. I heard myself answer: "After all, she was nothing but a machine, a beautiful machine. . . ."

***Through Time And Space With Ferdinand Feghoot:* XLII**

In 3082, Ferdinand Feghoot married Gwendolyn Jane, Queen of New Camelot, and ruled there as King for a glorious fifty-five years.

Landing alone, he was seized by her varlets and hustled off to the Palace. Seeing at once that she was the most beautiful Queen in the galaxy, and that she wept pitifully, he asked what was wrong.

"Prithee, fair sir," she replied, "my knights all proposed marriage to me, and I refused every one. In anger, they took service with wicked King Borogrund, who makes war on me. Now I have only peasants. I can't arm them, for only knights can fight well. What will I *d-d-do*?" But when Feghoot suggested that she make them all knights, she sobbed that there wouldn't be time: the enemy would arrive in the hour.

Feghoot took action. Bringing electronic equipment, he jury-rigged a breadboard assembly, set it up in a tent, and had all her men file through. As each peasant emerged, his eye flashed martial fire. Seizing axe, mace, or broadsword, he shouted, "Long live the Queen!"

King Borogrund's army was utterly shattered; only one wounded knight escaped to tell the sad tale. And the Queen, seating Feghoot beside her, said, "My Lord, they were perfectly splendid. Each man fought as though I had dubbed him myself! What did you do to them?"

"It's easy," answered Ferdinand Feghoot, "when you use printed sir kits."

—GRENDEL BRIARTON *(with thanks to Andrew Gould)*

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Each person has a place in the Company, and if there is any reason to believe that an employee is not in his right place, there is always the Bureau of Complaint to appeal to. Who among you, however, dares appeal?

THE DISPATCH EXECUTIVE

by E. William Blau

Pray, which is the way to London Town?
I must be there tonight.
O, walk an hundred miles and turn
To left, and then to right;
Then straight as a line, and then zig-zag,
Then up-hill, and then down;
Walk fast, and in six months you'll be
Not far from London Town.

—MOTHER GOOSE

I

KURT INSEL IS GROWING MIDDLE-AGED and he is tired. He does not want to go in to his office today. He sits in his little apartment parlor with his sugar buns and tea before him on the sun flooded table, and the thought strikes him that he has never really wanted to go in, all the mornings of all the years he has been with the Company. The idea seems strange to him after so many years. He plays with his teaspoon in the faded Dresden sugar bowl, turning the spoon this way and that, as though it is the idea, trying to see it from all sides at once.

Still, what will happen if he doesn't go in? The thought alone might be enough to convict him of disloyalty if the Board hears of it. The punishment, though not specified in the *Executive Directive* is terrible; the sentence as remote as the Board and as eternal. He has heard of other cases—strange overnight disappearances. One day a man sits at a desk as alive as he, with the same thoughts and hopes and pleasures, and the next day, gone—an empty desk, a silent office—the man vanished without a trace. What has happened to these men? Kurt puts down the teaspoon without stirring his tea. He will not think of it.

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The sun draws the tangle of shadows further across his little table as he thinks. Already he is late. He pours the tea into the sink, wraps the sugar buns, and puts them carefully back on the shelf in the cupboard. Then he checks the contents of his briefcase, throws his Company great-coat about his shoulders and leaves the apartment, coughing over his first cigarette.

He arrives at the inner city and makes his way to the Company building. He is thankful when he finally reaches the heavy bronze doors which swing into the outer lobby, for the winter sunlight, always more intense in the inner city, has gotten into his eyes and made his head hurt. Taking a firm grasp on his briefcase, he pushes himself into the confusion of the vast, muralled room. Loose masses of people obstruct him. Men, women, messengers, and guides get into his way. Already the early coffee shifts have started for the cafeteria, and they tangle him in their ranks. He pushes some and excuses himself to others, slipping in and out toward the great marble staircase which rises to the inner lobby, until he feels he might never reach the elevators, spending the rest of his life moving against the people across the marble floors, until just as he reaches the elevator-door he will lie dead among the ever moving feet which will step on the edges of his coat and kick his briefcase aimlessly across the floor.

But Kurt does, as always, reach the elevators. He walks down the long row of doors until he comes to one indicating his floor, and steps in. When the door opens again he leaves quickly, followed by the others, some of whom have become vaguely familiar to him over the years he has been with the Company.

At last, standing alone in the hallway, he lets out a little sigh and allows his shoulders to slump and his briefcase to dangle from his hand. Now there is only the outer office to get through, but this morning he is already weary.

He wipes the dust from his face with his handkerchief, clears his throat, examines his nails, smooths his Company great-coat and pulls his hat down tightly on his forehead.

He tucks his briefcase securely under his arm and opens the door which has KURT INSEL—HAROLD FENSTER—DISPATCH EXECUTIVES, unpretentiously lettered on it in gold. The roar and clatter of the outer office comes to an abrupt stop when he walks through the door, and a hundred pair of eyes look toward him. He turns his gaze downward and just a few inches ahead of him as the *Executive Directive* has instructed, and begins the long walk down the aisle of little desks which stretch back almost as far as the eye can

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see to the small wooden door carrying the simple legend: "Kurt Insel."

He moves past the desks for such a long time that he gets the strange sensation that he might have already passed the next desk and become hopelessly lost among them. Behind each one sits an anonymous girl, and each girl repeats to him a report on the nature of the morning. Of course, he never answers them. It is part of their function to give him this confidence each day, although he can't imagine what he should do with it.

Kurt keeps his face in the shadow of his hat and walks on until he finally reaches his door and unlocks it, pushing against it with a heavy sigh. The office is very good —very comfortable. The small closeness of the walls is unbroken by windows. Kurt does not miss a window anymore. A window would make the office merely an extension of the outer world. Without a window, the office at least exists only for him. Kurt is a part of it. Each person has his place in the Company, and this is his.

He takes off his Company greatcoat and hat, and lays them carefully over the little armchair in one corner. The Company wants nothing out of place in the office and he is responsible for it. He walks over to his wooden desk and sits down slowly. Everything is as it should be. The great pile of papers from all the committees and bureaus, containing the business of the week previous, are waiting for him. These he will arrange into one comprehensive report by the middle of the week and dispatch it to one of the anonymous girls outside who will type it and in turn dispatch it to the Multigraph Department, so that by the following week a copy of his report will be on every desk in the Company. Sometimes in the midst of his work corrections are sent to him so the reports have to be thrown away and done over again, and Kurt ponders on the apparent uselessness of his work, even when there are no corrections, because the report is already obsolete by the time the employees receive it. But Kurt's function is not to question his task but to perform it, so he takes the top paper from the pile and lays it before him. This done, he takes the small brass key from his vest pocket, unlocks the desk drawers and replaces the key.

Everything is always as he left it—his papers, trinkets, little bottles, photographs, cigarets—everything in order. Lighting a cigarette with satisfaction, Kurt takes his five pencils out of the center drawer and arranges them at the top of the desk.

He begins work on the first sheet and sees it is from the Bureau of Communication, the bureau most intimately connected with the

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Board itself, and considered to be the closest register of the actual occurrences of the Board for that week. Kurt lingers over this sheet for some minutes. The Board itself might have written some of it. How vast—how remote—it all is! There is nobody who really knows anything about the Board—not even Fenster, the other Dispatch Executive who has the next office, and whose functional contact with the outer world and superior knowledge of the Company and inner city in general Kurt so admires. Some say the Board is in Zurich or Kracow, but this only adds to the mystery. Fenster said once that he believed the Board was really right there in the Company building, but Kurt cannot believe this. If it were true why has nobody ever seen them?

He often wonders about the Board. He thinks of the wild descriptions he has heard—at times as a group of ancient men with shaggy white beards—at other times as unnamed beings who ride on animals everywhere they go. He has heard, as who hasn't, the rumors that actually the last member of the Board died generations ago, and that the Board has really not existed for hundreds of years. Kurt doesn't accept these rumors when he thinks about them logically, but still he can never be sure. If he were to send a messenger to see and return with an answer, and if the messenger had the rest of time to travel in, he would never reach the Board with all the vastness in between. Even to think of the Board is futile. Kurt puts the Bureau of Communication report aside, as nothing is ever changed on that one, and picks up the next sheet.

Gradually the morning wears on, and the pile of papers on Kurt's left continues to grow. He takes another paper from the pile on the right and then stops and looks more closely. The sheet is blue, and all the rest have been white. He reads at the top "Memorandum of the Bureau of Complaint". Outside of the sheet is perfectly blank.

Bureau of Complaint?

Kurt puts the sheet down, puzzled. He thinks back but he cannot recall having ever taken note of this bureau or seeing a blue sheet before. Possibly it is a new bureau—that must be it. Yet, he has not read of the establishment of a new bureau in the Bureau of Communication report.

Kurt leans back in his chair and bangs on Fenster's wall. "Fenster", he calls, "what is the Bureau of Complaint?"

"What?" Fenster shouts.

"I say, what is the Bureau of Complaint? Is it something new?" The blue sheet seems oddly out of place on his desk. He does not know what to do with it.

"Bureau of Complaint? Why no. It's been around as long as I can remember. . . ."

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"Yes?" Kurt asks, puzzled. "What's its function?"

"Handles Company grievances. Why?" Fenster calls.

Kurt thinks a moment. ". . . I've got to make sure my channel is maintaining its upkeep." he says quickly, hoping his voice has a note of authority, and then is silent. There is no answer from Fenster.

The thought is disquieting. The network of the Company is vast. It reaches into every home and every room. It is unthinkable that an employee, especially an Executive, would have a grievance against the Company, for the Company is good. But the Company must have many grievances against its workers. The Bureau of Complaint is the logical nerve center for substantiating such grievances. Kurt remembers his feelings in the apartment that morning and he is too upset to do any more work before twelve.

II

After lunch, Kurt goes to work again on the pile of reports. The next report is from the Department of Anonymous Girls. There is never anything intelligible on that report so he drops it in the wastebasket and lights a cigaret. As always, the basket is empty and the ashtray is clean. This has often been a disturbing note to Kurt, as it has been to others. The idea that there is somebody else, somewhere in the building, who has a key to the offices has caused more than one neurosis among Executives. Who would it be? Is someone sent by the Board to check on their activities when they are gone? If the person has a key to the offices, then he might have a key to the desks as well, for the desks are supplied by the Company. Kurt feels strange. Even if this person's sole function is to clean the ashtray and empty the wastebasket after they have gone in the evening, what else does he do when left to himself in that black world of vacant rooms, when there is no one to watch? No person spends his whole life content with only emptying wastebaskets. What is his real purpose in the empty building? Perhaps he is content just to sit at the desks when the executives sleep. Then, what of the offices that are suddenly empty . . . ? For the first time he feels uncomfortable in the little room.

He walks around the desk, examining it carefully, and it is then that he sees it: something that looks like an eye staring up at him from the floor by the desk leg. He remains for a moment, in sudden shock; and then puts his foot out cautiously and kicks the thing. It goes skipping across the floor and stops by the far wall. He walks over, and carefully picks it up. It is a button—a horrible, vulgar, worn mother-of-pearl button.

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There is no longer any room for doubt, and the proof is almost a relief, at first. He sits down at the desk and lays the button in front of him on the blotter. A pattern begins to take shape for him: a person who comes there at night. Is the Bureau of Complaint aware of this person? Does he visit other offices as well? Kurt decides to keep the button for evidence, yet he cannot let the person know he has it. He opens the right top drawer of his desk and drops the button in, laying a blotter over it. Then he closes and locks the drawer.

The next day he leaves the right top drawer locked, but the button remains on his mind all morning.

As he moves down the long counter at lunch time with his food-tray, in the First Basement Cafeteria, he sees Fenster ahead of him in the line. He wants to see Fenster. If he has ever wanted to see Fenster, it is now. He waves to him. Fenster waves back and continues on to the pastries. Kurt indicates a table and Fenster finally nods. Kurt decides to be very cautious in his approach to the subject. Perhaps he is the first with solid evidence of the night person. Perhaps he should not mention it at all especially to Fenster, whom Kurt has always suspected of being a Company spy. But by the time they reach their desert Kurt can no longer contain himself.

"Oh, by the way Fenster", he begins, "here's something odd . . . I found a button—a mother-of-pearl button lying on my floor yesterday morning."

Fenster looks up at him for a moment and then returns to his cheesecake.

Why the silence? Kurt wonders. What does it mean? "Yes. A button. Can you beat that? Ha ha ha."

"Guess it belongs to Mrs. Unter." Fenster remarks, wiping his mouth with his napkin.

"Mrs. . . . Unter?" Kurt repeats.

"Yeah. The Cleaning Woman. She comes in at night."

Kurt loses his appetite. Fenster knows! The button does not surprise him!

"What's the matter with you, Insel?" he hears Fenster's flat voice asking, "I think you need a vacation." He sees a tall sallow man at an empty table watching him intently.

"I'm a . . . I'm sick", Kurt mumbles getting up from the table. He has to get away and back to his office where he can think. Fenster knows! With a sudden clarity he sees the pattern before him. It has always been there, but until he got the blue sheet he had never recognised it before. Why do the offices have no windows? Why are there *two* Dispatch Executives? Does the Company allow him to exist only so long as he does not

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question that existence? Does the Company withdraw itself from a disloyal employee and isolate him for its own protection like a bit of irritation, having long since provided for the continuance of the employee's function by duplicating him but weeding out the imperfections? And Fenster, feeding him just enough information to destroy his security, is already preparing to force the issue and to function smoothly and efficiently, no doubt, when the showdown comes.

It is only twelve-thirty and the outer office is empty, but he locks his door and holds his head in his hands. The name the person answers to is Mrs. Unter. The name conjures up visions of great, brute arms and thick formless features. And she is a Cleaning Woman. What is behind that phrase? Cleaning Woman! What desire and directive masquerades behind that function when she comes up into the building at night, when only the emergency lights are on, and the offices are empty and dark?

III

It is almost ten before he reaches his desk the next morning. He sits down, determined to plunge himself into his work.

By eleven he is aware that his right elbow is uncommfortably hot. He lifts it quickly from his desk and notices a bright light coming from all around his right top desk drawer. He quickly unlocks it and burns his fingers on the knob. He takes out his handkerchief and opens the drawer. There is the button, glowing through the blotter and filling the drawer with light. He thrusts his hand into the heat with panic and picks up the button. It is as cold as when he put it in there but glowing brightly. His hand becomes hot and he quickly opens the bottom drawer and throws the button in and locks the drawer.

When he returns from lunch he is almost afraid to enter his office. When he does there is no sign of light from the desk, and although he watches carefully all afternoon, the drawer remains dark. He leaves the office that day feeling exhausted.

The next day is Thursday. He can see the bottom drawer glowing softly as soon as he steps into the office. Without even taking off his hat he runs to the drawer and opens it. There is no mistake—the button is gleaming more brightly than ever. Kurt feverishly takes the contents from all his other drawers and stuffs them down on top of the button, and slams the drawer. The rest of the day he waits, not even going down to lunch.

By one, it has begun to glow again, and by three it has become so bright that it hurts his eyes to look directly at it. Five o'clock is

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drawing near, and if he leaves it glowing all hope will be gone.

Desperately he picks up his wastebasket and goes into the outer office and, avoiding the eyes of the anonymous girls, he fills it with water at the water-cooler. As he returns to his office he notices Fenster leaning against the door frame of his own office, smoking a cigaret and watching him.

"What are you doing now, Insel?" Fenster calls, but Kurt pretends not to see him and goes into his office and locks his door. Then he pulls the bottom drawer open, pours the wastebasket of water into it, and quickly slams and locks it. The glow disappears and Kurt laughs aloud with relief. The water begins to seep out all over the floor but Kurt doesn't care about anything as long as the light is gone.

Friday morning he opens his office to find the whole room filled with a brilliant light. Horrified, he runs to the bottom drawer where the light is the strongest. He unlocks it and yanks the knob but it won't bulge. He pulls harder, moving the desk, but the water he has poured in has warped the wood and he can't move the drawer an inch. Terror overcomes him. He runs around the office trying to escape the light, but there is no place to hide. He must attack before he himself is attacked. He determines to go immediately to the Bureau of Complaint and pretend to bring the whole thing to their attention. He can no longer go on as things are, and besides, if he is right they are waiting for him anyway.

But all his pencils and papers are in the bottom drawer and he can't get to them. He goes out of his office, locking the door quickly behind him, and steps into Fenster's office. Fenster puts down the magazine he has been reading and looks up at Kurt inquiringly.

"I've got some urgent business", Kurt blurts out, "and they're exterminating in my office so I wonder if I could use your desk for a few minutes." Fenster remains seated a moment, considering the probability of Kurt's statement, and then stands up with a shrug of his shoulders.

Kurt sits down and collects his thoughts. Half the victory is in the approach. He must approach the Bureau of Complaint in the right way. He should have an obvious executive's touch to the letter to show he is important, yet enough humility to show he doesn't think he is. Kurt finally takes a piece of paper and writes:

Bureau of Complaint
Room 35001
Company

Dear Sirs:

The recent communication of the Bureau of the other day, eg: Monday, has established its

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validity with the intelligence of this writer.

In consequence he will be able to set aside a portion of his time for the registration of a matter pertinent to the aforesaid Bureau.

It is to be found within precedent to pursue this course of action in the words of Walt Whitman, viz: "Shut not your doors to me, proud Libraries".

Therefore, the writer will be assured of your disposal and wishes to be

Utterly Sincere,
Kurt Insel
Dispatch Executive

As he reads it over with satisfaction he becomes uncomfortably aware of Fenster hovering behind him, so he stuffs it in an envelope and addresses it.

"See you're writing to the Bureau of Complaint", Fenster observes, looking over Kurt's shoulder.

". . . Yes." Kurt answers, becoming very preoccupied with the sealing of the envelope.

"What seems to be the trouble?" Fenster asks in an offhand manner.

Kurt continues to stare in the other direction. "I've asked for an appointment." He finally answers.

"Ah . . ."

Kurt is not sure if that is a question or a statement. "I'm complaining about Mrs. . . . Unter." he feels forced to add.

"Good!" Fenster exclaims. "I think that's a great idea!"

"You do?" Kurt asks, turning with surprise.

"Yes. I think you should."

"Why?"

"The sooner the better." Fenster continues, ignoring Kurt's question. "Here. I'll mail it for you right away." He snatches the letter out of Kurt's hand and leaves him alone in the office. Kurt remembers Fenster's behavior at lunch, and starts forward to retrieve his letter, but it is too late; it is out of his hands. He goes back to his own office fearing what he had done.

IV

Monday morning it is after eleven when he finally reaches his office through the crowds of the inner city. The brilliance of Friday afternoon is completely gone now, and his office is dark. He snaps the light switch and finds on his desk a square piece of paper with BUREAU OF COMPLAINT printed at the top. It reads: "Mr. Kurt Inzip from Mr. Nass: You will be pleased to report at this Bureau Monday afternoon at 3:00 p.m.," and there is no signature.

Kurt is on edge as he waits for three to come. He isn't hungry at noon-time and can eat no lunch. The note makes him feel cool in-

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side. His name isn't even spelled right. There is no doubt by now that Fenster is mixed up in it somehow. Perhaps Fenster knows about last Monday and has informed on him.

At three, Kurt catches the elevator that is headed for the top floor where the Bureau is located. He gets off and walks down a narrow, dusty corridor that needs a new coat of paint. The corridor is against the outer wall of the building, and there is a row of windows along it. He hears the wind that blows forever at this height rattling the dusty window panes, and seeing the sheer drop from the windows makes him dizzy, so he keeps against the yellowed wall to his right. There is only one door in the whole corridor, and at the far end, one old-fashioned radiator and a barrel of rags. There are a lot of scraps of paper lying about, and some orange peels. On the door is the number 35001, and beneath it, in gilt so faded that only an outline remains, is BUREAU OF COMPLAINT—NEVER CLOSED.

Kurt knocks on the door. There is no answer. He opens the door and looks in on a vast room at least two stories high, which takes up the whole floor and is filled with a purple, dusty half-light like a railroad station. In the wall to the right, three narrow windows rounded at the top and two stories high, let in the fading pink light of afternoon through their sooty panes. The whole ceiling is a dome another story high, the very top of the building itself, and Kurt hears the wind shrieking across it. An old dim light fixture hangs from the center of the dome on a chain two stories long.

The room is cold, especially near the smooth concrete floor where the wind seeps in and creates a draft. Along the door wall and the wall opposite the windows is a haphazard row of leather chairs with wooden arms. The leather is old and cracked, and the stuffing hangs out of some of them. All along the walls are vague piles of papers, rags and other rubbish, and against the far wall at the back are a number of cardboard boxes and barrels, as though the room had originally been intended as a storeroom, or a loft. On one wall is an old box telephone and finally, far in the back, is a long high desk like that in a courtroom, and sitting behind it, sending volumes of smoke into the grey air, are four men.

There is a very fat man whom Kurt has seen occasionally in the elevator, standing before the desk and moving his hands around as he talks in a voice that alternates between anger and a whine. The four men behind the desk are in a state of constant agitation, shifting around in their chairs, leaning across one another to talk among themselves, puffing at their

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cigars and paying no attention whatever to the man in front of them.

Kurt suddenly wants to run from the room, but instead he sits on the edge of one of the leather chairs by the door. He has become confused. He could not even bring the evidence because it is stuck in his drawer. Even as accuser he will be judged. He feels here more than down below, in the building, the cold machinery of isolation moving to envelope him. Kurt stops thinking and feverishly tries to prepare a statement in his mind.

Suddenly the man in the middle behind the desk stands up and angrily brings both fists down on top of it with a crash. "Go away, Mr. Pawl! Go *away!*" he roars at the fat man. "You're dismissed! Dismissed! Dismissed!" The fat man turns panting, and thunders out of the door past Kurt, his eyes wide, his face red, and his lower lip hanging down and dry.

The members of the Bureau become very quiet and immobile, staring straight ahead of them, their cigars forgotten in their ashtrays. The man in the center calls out, "Next case. Mr. Kurt Inzip."

Kurt gets up and slowly approaches the desk. He feels he will stumble. "That's Insel, sir." he mumbles as he crosses the vast floor. He stops before the desk, looking up at the florid, heavy-set man with rimless glasses, who has called him.

"I'm Nass," the mans says. "Well?"

Kurt stands dumbly, having lost the power of speech.

"Our time is precious." Nass says.

"I know they have told you but you can't take their word", Kurt begins absurdly, ruining all his preparation. "You can't believe their version. I was sick that morning. . . . I was very sick."

"You are sick, Mr. Inzip. Well, I don't see . . ."

"No! I'm not. I was. You don't understand."

"We are trying to, Mr. Inzip. You were sick."

"Yes I was. I really was then."

"When were you sick, Mr. Inzip?"

"What was the trouble?" the man on the end asks, staring ahead of him.

"I was . . . last week I didn't want, that is I didn't think I could come in."

"Then you didn't come in last week, Mr. Inzip." Nass affirms.

"I . . . yes I *did* come in."

"You said you were sick," recalls the man on the end.

"I wasn't sick I mean."

"You weren't sick?" asks the thin man on Nass's right.

"I *was* sick," Kurt says wretchedly.

"Come, come, Mr. Inzip. You were sick or you weren't sick. Were you or weren't you?" Nass asks impatiently.

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"I didn't *think* I was sick." Kurt answers, his voice shaking.

"Didn't . . . think . . . he . . . was . . . sick . . ." the man on Nass's left repeats, writing in a large book.

"You said you didn't want to come in. . . ." the man on the end adds.

"I did want to . . . I felt *sick*. I didn't know I wanted to . . ."

"You just said you didn't think you were sick, Mr. Inzip." Nass says.

"I did think so!"

"You said you didn't." says the man on Nass's left, looking in the book.

"I mean I just felt it."

"Then, you weren't really." Concludes the man on Nass's right.

"I was . . . I thought I was . . . I . . I don't know! I don't know!" Kurt shouts at the desk.

"There, there, Mr. Inzip. We must control our nerves." Nass says soothingly. The man on the end pours a glass of water from the large metal pitcher on the desk and comes around and hands it to Kurt.

"Drink this. You'll feel better." he smiles, laying his hand on Kurt's shoulder. The rest of the Bureau have all relit their cigars and are blowing smoke over the edge of the desk.

"Why don't you smoke?" asks the man on Nass's right in a fatherly way.

"Thank you." Kurt says gratefully and lights a cigaret with uncertain fingers.

"Now, about this illness." Nass resumes.

"No no! It's Mrs. Unter!" Kurt shouts, his nerves wearing thin.

"Ah. Mrs. Unter is sick."

"No. She isn't." Kurt says. He is trying hard to control himself. "She isn't sick. She's in my office. Don't you understand?"

"In your office?" the Bureau choruses.

"I have her button and I know. I did everything but it wouldn't go out. I've filled my desk with water and it wouldn't!"

"What do you mean, Inzip?" Nass roars. "Are you tampering with Company property?"

"No wonder he was sick." The man on the end comments dryly.

"It's her button! Her button!"

"You have destroyed her property, and now she wants something of yours to make up for it." The man on Nass's right sums up idiotically.

Kurt is filled with panic. They are not trying to understand him. They are making him sound like an idiot. What are they after!

"It's not *your* office Inzip." Nass comments.

"Insel!" shouts Kurt.

"Then, do you feel she was sent to . . . she . . . say . . . has come to harm you, and that's why you were sick," says the man with the book.

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"Ah!" says the man on Nass's right.

"That's a serious charge." Nass warns in a low voice.

"I don't make the charge!" Kurt says.

"You already have," says the man with the book. "It's registered."

"I haven't!"

"Well, we'll see what can be done, Inzip." Nass sighs. "Of course, it might go better for you if you modify your statements a bit . . ."

"But I haven't made any statements!" Kurt says hoarsely.

"Yes you have," says the man with the book, holding it up for Kurt to see.

"Why don't you let us tone them down a bit when we send in our report, Inzip?" Nass suggests in a confidential tone.

Kurt is grateful that his statements will be toned down. He only wants to leave and go back to his little office and warm cream walls, and pencils. "Yes. Oh yes!" he says, feeling suddenly relieved.

There is a long silence while the wind shrieks across the dome and rattles the windows. Then Nass says, "Good. That's all, Inzip. We'll be in touch with you soon."

"Thank you, sir," Kurt mumbles, and goes to the door.

"We'll take care of everything . . ." Nass calls as Kurt closes the door behind him. When he stands in the corridor he feels so weak that he must lean against the wall for a few minutes before returning to the elevator.

V

For the next two days Kurt sits in his office getting very little done. He receives no communication from the Bureau, and he is beginning to fear a summons from the Board itself. He has finally managed to get his bottom drawer open, and has taken his possessions out in a soggy lump and put them back in their proper places. The button has ceased to glow, but he has scratched some of the finish on his desk. It is very noticeable.

At lunch time he manages to avoid Fenster by sitting at a table already occupied by three other people, but coming up in the elevator the second day he finds Fenster standing beside him.

"Hear you stirred up quite a fuss." Fenster finally says.

"What do you mean?" Kurt whispers.

"That business about Mrs. Unter. It's all over the Company, you know."

"What? What business?"

"I'll bet the Board decides she's just inefficient, so she won't be prosecuted. . . . But it was a good trick. I didn't think you had it in you."

"Had what in me?" Kurt asks out loud.

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"Oh, come off it, Insel. We're all looking for the same thing. And I'm not saying anything. . . ."

Kurt remains silent, feeling all the eyes in the car turning toward him.

"I think you'll get a promotion out of this." Fenster adds. "In fact, when I mailed your letter, I put in a word for myself. . . ."

"Good God what are you talking about! I don't *want* a promotion! I'm not . . ."

The car comes to a stop at their floor, and Fenster laughs with more suggestiveness than humor. "Just remember who your friends were when you were down here, Insel," he says, thumping Kurt's shoulder, and goes off toward the washroom. Kurt returns to his office with his head spinning. He locks his door and sits down miserably at his desk.

The next morning he finds a memorandum on his desk from Mr. Nass, telling him that he will be pleased to report at the Bureau of Complaint, at three.

It is already after three when he thinks of it again. He rushes from his office without taking time to close his desk or door, and arrives at the Bureau ten minutes late.

When Kurt enters the great, dusty room again, there are only three men present at the high desk. The man who sits at the end is gone.

"Come in, Inzip! Come in!" Nass says. "The Bureau has good news for you!" He winks one huge eye, and the man with the book smiles broadly. "The Bureau has presented your case before the Board", Nass continues, "and you have acquitted yourself."

"Acquitted myself?" Kurt thinks. "Oh thank God! Thank God!"

"Not only that, but we've gotten your promotion for you! And the Bureau is directed to make every effort on your behalf about this Unter thing. . . ." Kurt's relief turns cold. Then he remembers that he has left his office open and all his drawers unlocked. The cold becomes agony. He fidgets, waiting for his chance to get back before it is too late.

"Already," Nass continues, now reading from a sheet of close-typed legal paper, "Nuvola has been despatched to Brazil, and immediately . . ."

"Brazil?" Kurt repeats. "But why did he go to Brazil?"

The smile on the face of the man with the book disappears, while the person on Nass's right continues to stare tensely in front of him as if he is afraid he will come apart any minute. Nass stops reading, lays the paper down and studies Kurt for a long while. "You *do* wish to be helped, don't you?" he finally asks.

"Yes. Of course, sir." Kurt answers.

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There is a pause while Nass finds his place again. ". . . Nuvola has been despatched to Brazil", he continues with great emphasis, "and immediately following this meeting, Trocken and Nariz will make ready to sail for Benares to await further orders." Trocken, the man on the right, begins stuffing papers and pencils into his briefcase.

"Benares." Kurt mumbles.

Nariz and Trocken arise from the desk and walk toward the door, talking between themselves in low tones. Kurt stands, listening to their feet for a long while. "Well?" asks Nass, "Is there anything else?"

The door slams at the end of the room and the wind moans outside. Kurt continues to stare blankly into the vague shadows behind the desk.

"Nothing else? Good." Nass says, suddenly becoming a mass of activity—sorting papers, transferring them from one drawer to another, stuffing fistfuls into his briefcase—unaware that Kurt is in the room. Then he stands up and throws a company great-coat that has been lying on a leather chair nearby, around his shoulders. Stepping away from the desk, he strides ferverishly around the room—poking at piles of trash and examining the walls, dome, windows, and furniture in the half light, and then aware of Kurt again he blusters, "My post will be Munich. You've been promoted, so from now on you'll get out of that office and stay up here to take care of the Bureau for us."

"But my office!" Kurt says. "That's why I came here! I don't *want* to get out!"

"Nonsense. Everybody wants to get out." Nass says, picking up an old leather chair and carrying it to the other end of the room.

"My office! My office!" Kurt shouts, on the verge of tears.

"You're up here now, Inzip!" Nass calls, much annoyed, his back to the room. "Have you no gratitude?"

Kurt can faintly hear a scraping noise. It is Mrs. Unter, stirring in the bowels of the building. Already she is going stealthily up to his office. In a moment she will see it deserted. She will go in, slowly at first, and then she will run to his desk. She will leap upon it. She will crouch in his chair and roar. She will bury her huge red hands in his open drawers and close her fists on his possessions. She will sniff at them with her nose and roll her great eyes in her sunken face.

"You mustn't do this!" Kurt pleads.

"We are going on your account." Nass answers laconically, and walks over to the telephone. Taking hold of it with both hands he rips it from the wall and pushes it into Kurt's arms. "Keep this with you at all times, Inzip." Nass

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says, heading for the door. "We'll be in constant touch with you."

"You don't understand. . . ."

The door slams with a bang. Kurt stands in the center of the huge, empty room, staring at the door. The broken telephone dangles from his hand. The wind wails, and the cold draft chills his legs. The light grows dimmer and blends the chairs and rubbish into deep shadows along the worn brick walls as the winter sun turns red against the tall windows. Tears begin to fill his eyes and he shouts, "You bad people!" shaking his fist at the door, "You bad people! You have destroyed me and you don't even know my name!" and he buries his face in his hands.

The knock on the door is barely loud enough to be heard, and after a moment the door opens and a small man with a faded silk vest and a green eyeshade steps into the room, holding some broken machinery in his hands. "Is this the Bureau of Complaint?" he asks in a whisper. He sees Kurt standing in the center of the room, and stares at him a moment, visibly impressed. Then, taking the sobs as a kind of encouragement, he approaches timidly and begins, "You see, sir, I am the Mimeograph Executive, and . . ." but Kurt sinks to his knees, and the only sounds that can be heard in the room are the moans of the kneeling man, and the wind that rattles the dusty windows and shrieks forever across the dome.

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The old mare's young one was useless for pulling a cart or even carrying a boy—but he did have one gift to offer Theron which was well worth the trouble of propping him up on a boulder. . . .

PIGGY

by Kit Reed

THERON SWORE IT. A GREAT winged figure swooped out of the sky one night and threw itself on Duchess, the old Percheron.

Theron ran in the house as soon as it happened and tried to tell his Daddy, but his Daddy just pushed him aside and said "Don't talk dirty," and that was the end of it until the mare foaled the next year. The colt was pink, plastic pink, like the thumb-size baby dolls in the ten cent store, and Theron's Daddy had to look close to see the light planting of white hair. The mare's pink baby was round as a couple of barrels, and when he finally got up he teetered on legs too spindly to support a puppydog. Right off the Pinckneys named him Piggy.

Mostly, Piggy was Theron's pet. Before Piggy came, Theron didn't have anybody in the crumbling old house. There was nobody to talk to but his mother and nobody to play with but the twins, who were too small even to sit up alone, so he just naturally took to Piggy, and pretty soon he was keeping Piggy right outside his bedroom window, in a stall made by the caved-in part of the porch. Theron stuffed hay in between the carved railings so Piggy could eat lying down, and he hung a grain-bucket from one of the marble pillars, where Piggy could poke it with his nose. His mother gave him a big flowered bowl her granddaddy had used to make punch in, so when Piggy wanted water he wouldn't have to go all the way down to the trough.

Cold nights, when winter was frosting the marsh grass, Mrs. Pinckney would look out the window at Piggy shivering, and she'd get a quilt or Mr. Pinckney's Navy parka and throw it over Piggy in his stall. Sometimes she'd let Theron go outside and sit with him, and Theron would light a little fire.

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The night of the hurricane, Mrs. Pinckney made Theron bring Piggy in the big double doors to take shelter in the living room, and after that Piggy used to spend a lot of time inside. Mrs. Pinckney would send Theron after him whenever Mr. Pinckney was shrimping out of Port Royal or spending his money in Beaufort, the nearest big town. He had clean habits when he was indoors, and he'd fold his legs under him by the fire, with his head in Theron's lap, and blow little noises through his nose at Luvver and Fester, the twins. Mrs. Pinckney would sit in the chair that Theron's great-great-great-great had brought with him all the way from England, watching Theron tying knots in Piggy's yellowed mane, and she'd think how nice it was for Theron to have a pet.

Daytimes, when Theron was gone, Piggy used to call to her, and many's the time she sat on the porch rail, just looking at him. He even tried to follow her a couple of times, getting unsteadily to his feet, but she made him keep to his stall and wait for Theron, because he belonged to the boy.

Theron's Daddy felt differently about things. He never went near the stall when he could help it, and the very mention of Piggy made him mad. He had a right to be galled. He'd been pouring grain into Piggy for years, hoping he'd get strong enough to pull a plow, or at least to take the twins out in the basket cart, but Piggy went all shivery every time Mr. Pinckney brought the cart around and his legs buckled every time Mr. Pinckney tried to put the harness on. Mr. Pinckney would swear at him and then Piggy would have to eat some more so he could get his strength up again. Even Theron couldn't get him to move. At first Mr. Pinckney put up with it because Piggy was just a colt and the rest of the family liked him a lot.

But by the time Theron was fifteen Piggy was five years old and Mr. Pinckney had had just about enough. He was eating more grain than Duchess and Rollo put together and he hadn't done a lick of work in his whole pink life. Theron got up one morning to see his father sitting on the porch rail and looking down at Piggy, all curled up like an oversized tabby-cat at his feet.

"Morning, Theron," Mr. Pinckney said.

"Mornin, Daddy."

"I was just lookin at Piggy here." Theron's heart sank.

"Yes, Daddy," Theron said, and he perched his behind on the porch rail and looked at Piggy too. Piggy lowered his white eyelashes and gave him a yellow look.

Mr. Pinckney settled his bristly chin in his collar. "Piggy's eaten enough of my grain. I'm gonna call the dog warden tomorrow and have him put away."

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"The *dog* warden." Theron looked hurt.

Mr. Pinckney poked Piggy with his toe. Hairless, porcine, Piggy was nibbling thoughtfully at his hoofs. "You call that thing a horse?"

"Piggy's a *good* horse, Daddy," Theron said.

His daddy jerked his head at his old coon hound. "So's Archambault."

"I *mean* it, Daddy. You just give me a chance with him and you'll see." Theron mumbled some words around in his mouth till they tasted right. Then his face lit up. "I bet I could have him broke for ridin by tonight." He ran his fingers through Piggy's sparse yellow mane. "You been sayin Mama shouldn't have to walk all that way to town. Piggy could take her."

"That's right, Eldred." Theron's mother shook Theron's feather mattress out the window by their heads. She didn't care about riding him one way or the other, but Piggy was a special friend of hers.

Archambault came up and licked Piggy on the nose.

"Okay," Theron's Daddy said. "You get him broke by tonight and you can keep him."

"Gee, Daddy." Theron was already coaxing Piggy to his feet. "Hey, Luvver," he said, and he gave Luvver the special look that meant he'd better hop to it or he'd get what for. Between them, they got Piggy hove to and headed for the back field. Theron was walking in front, pulling Piggy along, looking proud as Lucifer, and for a minute Piggy was really picking up his feet, instead of just dragging them along. "You just wait, Daddy," Theron said. "He'll be broke in before you can get to Beaufort and back. Won't he, Luvver."

Five minutes later Luvver was back. He tugged at his Daddy until he gave him a bucket of grain. "Piggy sat down," he said.

They held the grain out in front of Piggy until he followed it to the pasture. Then they let him lie on his side and eat grass while Theron rode Luvver around and around, pretending to go on all fours, trotting and cantering so Piggy could see what it was like. Then they got him propped up on his four legs and Theron put Luvver on his back. Piggy sat down. Luvver slid off, hollering "Hey hey, that's the way," and Theron took him by the collar and said "Don't be fresh."

Next time he slid off, Luvver hollered "I'll use force, you dumb horse," and "He's too fat up where I sat" the next. Each time he said something he'd hit the ground and look foolish for a minute, and then he'd start swearing at Piggy to beat the band. When Theron shook him he'd say "Piggy made me say it. I had to talk like that." Theron just said "Aw, Luvver, don't be dumb," but next time he slid off Luvver

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said "I went dump and hurt my rump," and Theron told him to get back to the house and send Fester out instead.

While he was waiting for Fester, Theron jacked the back end of Piggy up again and pushed him sideways so his belly was over a rock and he couldn't sit down. It was near noon and Fester was slow coming, so he decided to mount Piggy himself. Piggy looked around at him with an injured expression as he scrambled up on the fat back. Then he shimmied his bald rear quarters a bit, trying to sit down, and he curled his lip at Theron when he found out he couldn't sit down because of the rock. His eyelids drooped and he whuffled as if he'd been betrayed.

"There, there, Silverhair," Theron said, and patted him on the neck. Then he reared back because a crawly feeling had come over him, and he didn't know from one minute to the next what he was going to say. Piggy tried to sit down again, and before he could stop himself Theron was poking him with his heels and spouting

"Come on horse
I got no other
Gotta break you
For my mother."

It scared him so much he scrambled off and ran halfway across the field. Piggy wiggled his hind quarters, trying to get his middle off the rock. Theron snuck up on Piggy, from the wrong side this time, and got on again. He sat there for a minute, feeling different about Piggy and the field and the day, and suddenly something started prickling inside of him and before he could help it he opened his mouth and sang out:

"Life is real, life is earnest
And the grave is not its goal
Dust thou art, to dust returnest
Black as the pit from pole to pole"

and it was so beautiful that Fester almost caught him crying when he appeared suddenly in the field.

"Hello, little fellow," he said to Fester, who thumbed his nose. Then he slid down off Piggy because he couldn't trust himself to go on. "You get on back to the house, Fester. I don't need you here. And you tell Momma and Daddy to come on down here just before it gets dark." He made a shooing motion. "Git."

As soon as Fester had gone he went back to Piggy and looked long into his yellow eyes. Piggy just breathed in and out, not much caring, and let his lower lip droop because it had been a long hot day."

"What you got in you, horse?" Theron said, and when Piggy wouldn't even turn his head far enough to nuzzle Theron's hand, Theron climbed up on him again to see if that strange feeling would

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come back. As soon as he got on the whole field seemed to turn all green and shimmery, and the sky was changing colors like a piece of mother of pearl. He shook his head because all sorts of strange things were buzzing around in it, and before he could stop himself he was talking out loud again, in words that sounded even fancier than the poems they were reading this year, in the seventh grade. Theron just threw his head back and listened to himself, talking long, rolling musical lines about things he'd never heard of in this world, and he kept it up until he felt Piggy shaking underneath him, getting tired, and then he tumbled off and led Piggy under a shade tree where they could both get some rest.

When Theron's mother and Daddy came down to the field that night, there was Piggy, standing up straighter than he ever had in his fat life, and Theron looking tall and proud, was sitting on his back. He stayed up until he was sure they'd had a good look at Piggy, and then he slid down and said "See, Daddy. He's broke. He carried me just fine."

Mr. Pinckney was just about to open his mouth and say "If he's so well broke in let's see him walk," but Mrs. Pinckney was grabbing him by the elbow and dragging him away, saying "That's wonderful, Theron," with every step she took. When they got out of earshot she told Mr. Pinckney it didn't really matter if Theron had propped Piggy up on a rock. If he cared that much about him let him keep him, and if she saw the dog warden even drive past in his pickup truck she was going to forget the marriage vows and fill Mr. Pinckney full of shot.

Theron came back from the field so late that his parents were already in bed. His mother had left a plate of hoppinjohn on the table, but he was too stirred up to eat. He went to bed instead, murmuring verses over and over to himself, so he'd be able to remember them the next day.

Everybody thought Theron was in school the next morning, like he ought to be, but when Luvver and Fester started playing hide-and-seek, and Luvver left Fester hiding his eyes on the tree counting to a million and two, he took off for the back field to hide and found Theron sitting on Piggy in the middle of the field, waving his arms for all he was worth. Luvver said why wasn't he in school, but Theron just said something he couldn't understand and gave him such a ferocious look that he turned and ran for home. He didn't even tell Fester about it when Fester finally found him hiding under the marble-topped pier table, where Theron's Daddy kept his boots.

Long and fine-ringing words were swimming in Theron's head

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when he came up for dinner that night. He came late, about six, and everybody but his mother was sitting out on the front porch. Theron slid around back and pulled up at the kitchen table while she had her back to him, working at the stove.

"Mama," he said, and she jumped because she hadn't heard him come in at all. "Mama, don't you think this is beautiful?" and then he said a long, musical piece that ended,

"Footprints in the time of sands,"

hugging his skinny shoulders, trying to hold the words within himself because they warmed his insides.

His mother touched his head affectionately. "You better eat your grits."

His father wouldn't even listen.

Theron cornered Luvver outside the cold house after school the next day, and said poetry at him and said poetry at him. Luvver was quiet enough, and Theron's heart lightened, until he saw that Luvver was quiet mostly because he was picking his nose.

He kept pretty much to himself after that, going down to the field as soon as he got home from school. He was quiet and edgy most of he time, thinking about the poetry that would come to him as soon as he got on Piggy's back. Piggy still hated standing up, but he seemed to know how much pleasure it gave Theron, because he stood patiently as long as Theron wanted him to.

Once, Theron came home from school to find his mother on her knees beside Piggy, running her fingers over his balding neck. She looked up at him and said, "Is there something special about Piggy, son?"

He said, "I tried to tell you, Mama. He makes poetry come."

"These things I hear you say in your sleep?"

"I guess so, Mama." He wished she would let him go. He wanted to get on Piggy's back again.

"It was real strange," she said thoughtfully. "He almost tried to get up a while ago. He kept poking me with his nose like there was something he wanted me to do."

Not long after that Theron built a leanto down by the field, and moved Piggy out of his stall on the porch for good. He snuck out of the house with a Queen Anne chair and a pile of quilts and a Holland vase to make the place look pretty, and he fixed up the shack. When fall came, he used a lever to roll the big rock in the door of the shack, so that they could sit there most of the day, Theron mouthing poetry and Piggy drowsing a little, one hip dropped, listening to Theron's voice. His daddy was off with the shrimp fleet, looking for better waters, and there was nobody to

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bother Theron about how much time he spent down at the field.

Daytimes Piggy would let Theron ride him, and new lines would come to him as he sat, and evenings he would talk to Piggy, reciting as many lines as he could remember. Piggy would lie on his fat flanks heaving. He'd put his muzzle in Theron's lap and look up at him with yellow eyes. One of the twins would come down with a little pail of supper and Theron wouldn't have to go back to the house until late at night. Sometimes his mother would stop him in the halls and look him in the eyes and try to talk to him, but he'd say "Night, Mama," and go to his room. In bed, he would cross his feet and look at the ceiling, calling the lines as they came to him. Soon there were so many of them crowding in his mind that he was afraid he'd forget some, and he took to writing them down. He moved into the shack that October, and he and Piggy lived quietly in the haze of autumn, with words flying around their heads like dandelion puffs in the sun.

It was too beautiful not to share. Theron went up to his Daddy's rolltop desk one day and got a magazine and copied the address down, because he thought other people ought to be able to see Piggy's poetry too. He got three cents from his mother, who loved Theron enough to let him go his own way, and he got out one of his favorite poems and mailed it to the Breeders' Gazette. He went down to the mailbox every day for a couple of weeks, looking for a letter, and then he forgot about it for a while.

In November Theron's Daddy came home. He dropped his canvas bag and his yachting cap on the floor in the front hall and peeled off the twins, who were climbing up his trousers, and asked Mrs. Pinckney where Theron was.

She chased the twins into the kitchen and said, "Down't the field."

Theron's Daddy gave her a close look. "He been any help to you since I left?"

"Course he has," she said, edging in front of the dining room door so he wouldn't see the harness Theron was supposed to repair each summer still waiting on the dining room table.

"He's been wasting his time with that—*horse*." Mr. Pinckney pushed his jersey sleeves up above his elbows and looked around for something to threaten Theron with.

"Eldred Pinckney, you lay one hand on that boy . . ." Mrs. Pinckney stood toe to toe with him.

He backed down a little. "It's not Theron, it's *Piggy* I'm after," he growled. "Should've let the dog warden take him right off. I'll drive him down to Beaufort to-

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night, and see what I can get for him . . ." Theron's Daddy was so mad he'd forgotten Piggy wouldn't walk. He grabbed a cane from the elephant-foot umbrella stand and barged for the front door. The screen door swung in and banged him in the face and he reared back to see a little man in a sack suit still reeling from his battle with the door.

"It's wonderful. *Wonderful,*" he said, sweeping right past Theron's Daddy and taking Mrs. Pinckney by both hands. "Where is he?" He readjusted a folder of papers under his arm and started sniffing around the house.

"What's wonderful," Mr. Pinckney said, standing smack in the doorway.

"Why, *this,*" the man in the sack suit said. He closed his eyes as if he were in church and started reciting:

"Sky of sky! with clouds all brindle
With the birds that dart between them
And thy sun which doth enkindle
Nightingales before we've seen them
In our nooks . . ."

Then his voice trailed off as he saw that Theron's parents didn't think it was wonderful at all, and he said, "Oh, you didn't know about it," his voice getting fainter and fainter, ". . . perhaps I'd better explain . . ."

A little later, while Mr. Pinckney was sulking on the widow's walk, Mrs. Pinckney took the man in the sack suit down to Theron's field. Theron was just taking Piggy into the shed.

"Theron, honey, this is Mister Brooks. He runs a poetry magazine . . ."

Mister Brooks flushed to his round collar and said "That's just in my spare time, I'm afraid. Actually I work for the Breeders' Gazette. I was down this way doing a story on hogs . . ."

"You got my poem?" Theron said, and pulled him inside.

He sat Mister Brooks down on a marble-topped commode, far enough away from Piggy so that Mister Brooks wouldn't be frightened of him, and they talked for a long time. Mister Brooks told Theron the Breeders' Gazette didn't exactly take to his kind of poetry—in fact it didn't take to poetry at all, but he happened to be working there ("just to support my poetry magazine") and he saw it and he wanted Theron to know he thought it was great. Then Mister Brooks gave him a copy of "Fragile," which was *his* magazine, and then he gave Theron five dollars, which was because his poem was in it. He got down off the commode and came over and took Theron's hand.

"If you could come back to Louaville with me, I bet I could get you a scholarship somewhere. You

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could write poetry for the reviews, the "Prairie Schooner," you could win the Bollingen prize . . ." Mister Brooks's eyes were hazed over with longing. "We'd both be *famous,* son. With your talent . . ."

" ." Theron said through his fingers, blushing red.

"What did you say?"

"It wasn't me—it was Piggy." He said it over and over, but Mister Brooks didn't want to understand. Theron did get it across to him that he couldn't go to Louaville ever and thank you very much. Then he looked down at the five dollars and he promised to send Mister Brooks all his poems because Mister Brooks seemed to feel so bad.

He patted Piggy on the nose and walked Mister Brooks to the edge of the field. "I couldn't leave Piggy, see," he said, and then he handed Mister Brooks a big sheaf of poems because he looked like he was about to cry.

On his way back to the house Mister Brooks must have said something to Theron's Daddy. He came down to the shack and took Theron's five dollars, but he never said anything about getting rid of Piggy again, and he stopped talking about sending Theron back to school.

There were little bits of money after that—Theron's Daddy took the checks to keep up the house—and copies of magazines, "Challenge" and "Output" at first, mimeographed just like "Fragile," and then austere-looking reviews that bored Theron and Piggy because there were no pictures in, and in a few years there were copies of "The Atlantic" and "The Saturday Review." Sometimes people came down to see Theron, all bright-eyed and loaded down with their own poetry, but Theron's Daddy sent them away. Every once in a while Mister Brooks would send Theron a clipping about a speech he'd given on poetry—Theron's poetry, because Mister Brooks had appointed himself Theron's Goddaddy and his agent (that was the way he explained it to Theron) and he was very famous now. He'd even quit The Breeder's Gazette.

In a few years the twins got married and moved away, and there began to be scruffy patches on Piggy's shoulders, and transparent hairs in his mane. Theron only sat on his back two hours a day now, and the words that came to him were all detached and sharp and pure, wheeling like gulls over the river.

His mother brought his food down to him every evening and took the poems to mail to Mister Brooks. Piggy's longest poem paid for the funeral when his Daddy died. After he was buried and put away, Theron's mother began hanging around the shack door of an evening, too lonely to go back to the big old house. At first Ther-

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on was impatient with her for being there, because the words were singing in his brain and he wanted to be alone with them, but one night when she touched his hand as she gave him the bucket, he looked down to see soft, trembly lines around her mouth, and he was so sorry about that and the way her hand shook that he opened the door and sat her down in the Queen Anne chair. Piggy rocked a little until he was lying alongside her, and put his head in her lap. They both sat quiet as marsh-rabbits and listened to Theron make the words ripple around them.

Theron threw back his head in the glow of the lamp, thinking he'd be perfectly happy if he could die right then. As his mother got up to go something glittered on her cheek, and Theron saw that there were tears in her eyes.

"Son, that was beautiful." She ducked her head and slipped out the door before Theron could say anything to her. Piggy nickered and looked almost as if he'd like to follow her up to the big house and put his head in her lap again. When she came the next night Theron opened the door and motioned toward the Queen Anne chair without a word. After that his mother spent all the long evenings with him and Piggy, listening to Theron in the closeness of the low-ceilinged shack.

One night, after she'd left, Piggy nudged Theron, who watched amazed as Piggy struggled to his feet without urging and edged his hindquarters around so that his belly was resting on the rock. He took Theron's sleeve gently in his teeth, tossing his head until Theron climbed on him, slowly, because Piggy tired easily these days. Then he gave Theron his most beautiful piece of poetry. When he got it in the mail, Mister Brooks was to say that it was the culmination—the pearl—of Theron's late period:

The sun kept setting, setting still,
Because I could not stop for Death.
Great streets of silence led away—
I took my power in my hand,
As far from pity as complaint.
My life closed twice before its close;
I asked no other thing.
Safe in these alabaster chambers
A spider sewed at
Night.

When his mother heard it in the next evening she wept.

Days sang and days passed, one like the other, until Theron's mother tapped at the door one night, bright-eyed and quivering. Theron sat quietly without beginning, because he knew she had

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something on her mind. She ducked her head, pretending to stroke Piggy's sparse mane, and then she saw that Theron wasn't going to begin; he was waiting for her to tell him what was bothering her.

"Mister Gummery was asking after you, Theron," she said.

Theron scratched his head.

"He was in the fourth grade the year you quit school." Her hands fluttered in Piggy's mane.

Theron rattled some papers, wondering what she would say.

"Theron." She got up abruptly, so that Piggy's chin fell off her lap and bumped on the floor. "He says the church is going to have its hundred-twentieth birthday next month, and he wants you to write them a play."

Suddenly, Theron's hands were still. "Mama, I don't know if I can. Piggy's getting tired." His voice sounded old. "And so am I. Couldn't he use some play out of a book?"

Her eyes were hurt. "I never asked you anything before. Your great-great granddaddy went to that church." She touched his arm gently. "Son?"

Theron looked at Piggy, whose skin was almost transparent now, under the light fall of his brindled mane. Piggy's white-rimmed eyes were wide open and swimming with love. He began rocking and rocking back and forth gently, back to floor, then belly, until he got his spidery legs under him and began heaving himself to his feet. He almost made it and then he fell, catching splinters in his delicate knees. Theron rushed to him but he was already struggling again, heaving until he got his legs under him. He rose with a massive gesture and with a sigh put his nose on Mrs. Pinckney's shoulder. Theron gave him one tragic look and then turned to his mother.

"You better go now, Mama. Piggy and I have to get to work."

Piggy carried Theron on his back all that night and all the next day, and they were still going the next evening, when Mrs. Pinckney scratched at the door of the shack. Theron's eyes were bloodshot and his fingers cramped from scribbling, but Piggy snatched at him with his teeth every time Theron tried to get down. Finally Theron scribbled "The End," so drunk with words that he didn't realize what he was writing, and with a gallant toss of the head Piggy fell sideways away from the supporting rock and sank to the floor. He turned his head toward Theron, and his eyes glazed over with pride.

"Mama," Theron said. "The play."

She turned her eyes away because she couldn't stand to see Piggy's rigid fat body or the pain in Piggy's eyes. After the church show, when Mrs. Pinckney sent a

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copy of the play, "A.B.," for Abraham, to Mister Brooks, he sent her a pile of money and told her Theron would certainly win the Poets' Prize. The money came too late. Piggy had already gone into a decline.

Theron called a heart specialist down from Charleston (he'd have nothing to do with a vet, like he'd had nothing to do with the dog warden years before) but there was nothing anybody could do. He took to his shack, pining so that he wouldn't even let his mother come in at night. She sat on a step outside, listening for Piggy's breath.

The prize came the day after Piggy was buried, under a wooden marker, down in the soft grass at the end of the field.

Five men in dark suits and black Homburgs and a woman in a lace-trimmed dress and a velvet tam pulled up outside the Pinckney house. Hushed by the brooding trees, they talked in whispers until Mrs. Pinckney opened the front door. She hardly recognized Mister Brooks; he was so gray and distinguished-looking. She seemed not to understand until, wordlessly, the woman held out a small leather case with the medal, nested in satin, bearing Theron's name.

"Oh," Mrs. Pinckney said. "You want my son."

They followed her around the house, past crumbled garden statues and a sundial that had sunk into itself a hundred years before, nudging each other and whispering as they caught glimpses of ruined chiffoniers and Federalist mirrors through the tall, low windows. Gently, they untangled vines and bushes from their ankles and, single file, looking reverent and austere in the bright daylight, they followed Theron's mother across the hummocked field. They picked their way up the worn little path and stood uneasily at the door to Theron's shack. His mama called to him. There was a rustling inside and Theron poked out his shock-white head.

He stood in the doorway with the sleeves of his blue work shirt rolled up above his gaunt elbows, and looked at the men in the fine black suits. Then he smiled tentatively at Mister Brooks, who nodded almost shyly, and the ceremony began.

The leader of the delegation gave his speech. Theron heard him say something about "most coveted prize in poetry," and he said "Piggy'll be glad," but the man in the sack suit gave him a puzzled look and went on with the speech. Theron waited respectfully until he was finished, stepping aside because he could see that the lady with the velvet hat was trying to peek inside his door. He looked over his shoulder and saw that the Queen Anne chair was standing up, just where

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he'd propped it, and Piggy's place was all swept clean. He whispered "That's where Piggy used to sleep," but she pretended not to hear.

". . . pleased to give you this award," the speaker concluded, and he held out the medal so Theron could see where they had engraved his name.

"It wasn't me," Theron mumbled, and they all nodded their heads and twittered to each other about his modesty. "It wasn't me it was Piggy," Theron said again, as they pressed the leather case with the medal into his hands. "It was Piggy," he said again as they bowed their heads in a moment's respect and then turned like nuns in a procession and started single file back across the field. "It was Piggy," Theron said, looking down at the glint of the medal in his hands.

He sat down on the front step of his shack, turning the case over and over, watching the sunlight catch the gold until tears shimmered in his eyes so that he couldn't see. Then he went inside and combed his hair and put on a clean shirt. Slowly, as the delegation had walked, he went to the end of the field and put the leather case on Piggy's grave.

A Meeting On A Northern Moor

"Who are you, flimsy ghost on a ghost-horse
Riding the night-wind?"
"Bugaboo my name,
Wild Huntsman, bogle, goblin—only words
To frighten ploughboys. Once my temples rose
All over Scandia and the Germanies,
My hand sent forth the lightnings. I was called
All-Father then, Wotan the Wise . . . and you,
Thin crone on the broomstick?"
"People call me now
Old Mother Holly, midnight witch, and hag,
Terror of nurseries. But I have been
High Lady of Heaven, giver of bread and life,
Frigga the loved and beautiful. Alas,
Old Lord and husband, know you not your wife?"

—Leah Bodine Drake

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One type of science fiction that does not seem to be written as often today as it used to be is the adventure story. Like the solid, deductive detective story in the mystery field, it is being replaced in part at least by other forms. It is, of course, by no means a dead form, as evidenced by the following tale of spaceship piracy and robots trained to kill, by an old master in this area.

THE CASE OF THE HOMICIDAL ROBOTS

by Murray Leinster

IT WASN'T POSSIBLE, OF COURSE, but the evidence piled up. A ship bound from Samara to Galatea flicked out of sight from the Samara spaceport. It never arrived at Galatea. A ship bound from Galatea to Normin lifted leisurely and hung at the limit of the landing-grid's support. It aimed for Normin. Nobody ever saw it again. A freighter carrying bulk *cyinth* delivered its cargo to Plim, loaded on four tons of iridium bullion for Galatea, and started light for that space-port. It was never heard of more. A passenger-ship on a practically local run among the suns of the cluster started out with a shipment of *crythli* pearls in its ship-safe and the usual passenger list. It vanished. Then a Patrol ship—

It was the vanishing of the Patrol ship that silenced rumors of piracy. Of course piracy was impossible. No ship in overdrive could be reached by any conceivable means. It couldn't be intercepted. It couldn't be communicated with. It was enclosed in what might be termed a bubble of intensely stressed space where the laws governing merely sun-stressed space did not apply—especially the laws that imposed increased mass with increased speed and set an upper limit to the velocity of electromagnetic radiation. In overdrive all bets were off, and one travelled as many times faster than light as the overdrive unit and the Duhanne cells that

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powered it provided. So it couldn't be piracy. Especially not when a Patrol ship vanished in overdrive like all the rest.

Only Patrol ships could carry weapons. They practiced their use against stray fragments of meteoric material, and nothing could withstand them. Even if an overdrive field could be broken from the outside, and whatever broke it could be set up so a ship running in overdrive must blunder into it, and even if a ship were made to come out of overdrive under the guns of a marauding vessel . . . even then a Patrol ship couldn't be destroyed by pirates. Trained and armed crews, absurdly powerful defensive equipment and still more potent means of offense. . . .

But nine ships had vanished within fifty lights of Galatea before there was even a murmur of a reason. Then Kilmer turned up with a preposterous tale. Part of his story checked, to be sure. He did have a master's ticket for space, as he said, but he'd never commanded a vessel. He'd been one of those eager, urgent junior officers who compete fiercely for promotions, and meanwhile get out to emptiness by any means and in any capacity to get space-service on their records.

So much was provable. But he claimed that he'd signed on the ship *Thetis* as an oiler and that he'd been on her when she lifted from Galatea. The *Thetis* was now among the missing, and Kilmer claimed to be a *Thetis* survivor—in fact the sole survivor of her crew. As he told it, some four hours in overdrive out of port, he'd been doing maintenance work in a space-boat blister. He'd released the lock-on bolts of the lifeboat to grease them, so there could be no failure of release in the highly unlikely event that the boat should need to be used.

He said that while he was in the lifeboat the *Thetis* came out of overdrive without warning, only hours from port. He felt the usual peculiar sensations attached—part giddiness, part nausea, and part the weird conviction that one is falling in a closing spiral pattern.

The *Thetis* gave a lurch, so violent that it tore the lifeboat from its place, sent it crashing through the blister and out loose in space. And then the *Thetis* went mad in the starlit emptiness.

Kilmer insisted that he'd watched the now-missing ship commit enormities of behavior. Nobody inside her hull could possibly have survived such antics. Then, said Kilmer, she went into overdrive again and vanished, leaving him alone. He didn't know where he was, but he headed for the brightest sol-type star he saw, and by great good luck one of its planets was human-occupied. His ground-call radio was out of commission and he landed at the

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space-port on rockets. And he crashed, wrecking the space-boat.

This was the tale he told when he got back to Galatea. He carried a written statement from the Patrol that he'd crashed on Phena III; in a ship's lifeboat that was too badly shattered to be identified. The Patrol office had sent him by passenger-liner back to Galatea, and there he told his tale.

It wasn't believed. No ship could possibly do what he said the *Thetis* had done. Emergency-drive strong enough to fling a lifeboat out through its blister couldn't come on unless ship-gravity was set to compensate for it inside the ship—there were robots to watch over such matters. There were devicts to check and cross-check each other so that literally nothing could happen which would injure or even imperil any human being in the liner. A ship-door couldn't close if a human were passing through. And every device was contrived to fail safe. If anything did go wrong, it could not go wrong in a manner to imperil the ship or any of its company.

So Kilmer's story, said the Patrol, could not be accurate. It couldn't be proved that he'd been aboard the *Thetis,* and it had not been proven that the space-boat came from that vessel. But it could be proved that unless the basic design of robots was hazardous—and civilization had depended on robots for centuries, now, without a failure—what he said could not be objectively true. He had been through some very harrowing experience, the Patrol psychologists considered, but his account of it was wrong.

They were very kind to him, though. They even offered him psych treatment to eliminate his erroneous memories. He refused it.

His tale was filed away and forgotten and he got a steward's job on a ship headed in the general direction of Earth. For almost two months afterward, space-traffic around Galatea went on normally. Then a Beluga freighter vanished, carrying a shipment of enriched abyssium.

Later, it was reported that a Lipo ship was missing. The Lipos were the only non-human race so far discovered who compared with humans in intellect. They were queer characters. In the Galatea area there were Lipo joints near most space-ports because their idea of entertainment appealed to some people. There were Lipo shops on a good many planets. But they didn't go in for building their own ships—they depended on human space-craft for their interstellar journeyings. The rumor that a Lipo ship had vanished was never substantiated.

Six months after Kilmen's dismissal from Patrol inquiry, still another ship disappeared.

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By that time Kilmer was on Earth. He got a job in a robot factory. He punched a time-clock, and he spent his pay on books about robot theory and how the laws of robotics are built into all automatic devices, and he was learning exactly why the *Thetis* couldn't possibly have done what he'd seen her do. But he got to be good, with robots. In fact, he helped install the ship-robots on a space-yacht called the *Endor*, when it was built at the Phipps ship-yard on Earth. It was built for a multimillionaire on Galatea. Kilmer had been born and raised on that same planet. The yacht was a marvellous small ship. One man should be able to handle her perfectly and go anywhere in the Galaxy he chose. There were some peculiar little cupboards and invisible doors in the ship, though, apparently hiding-places for apparatus not yet installed. All in all, the *Endor* cost as much to build as most Rim liners.

Kilmer put in for accompanying-delivery duty on her. It would get him back home . . . and he was curious. He'd been born and raised on Galatea and he'd never heard the name of the man she was built for. He didn't know *all* the rich men on his home planet, but anybody rich enough to order the *Endor*. . . . He got the job.

When the *Endor* left Earth in a liner's hold, Kilmer was deeply unsatisfied. He'd gone to Earth to find out something, and he'd learned only a part of it. He was still discredited and still disbelieved, and he heard that ships still occasionally disappeared out there.

The liner didn't go direct to Galatea, though, so the *Endor* would either have to be transshipped or driven under her own power the last part of the way. Kilmer was necessarily to go along in either case, because he was to instruct the *Endor*'s new owner in her rather special operation.

It was on the ship to Samara—where the *Endor* must change ships or drive—that he met Carol Madison.

She was small and grave and it was hard to make her smile. She was travelling with her father, a sandy-haired man who tried hard to see that she was entertained. He succeeded only in part. Something bothered her.

There were landings along the way, of course. They were all alike. The stop at Cygnus III was typical. The liner came out of overdrive with that singularly unpleasant blend of giddiness and nausea and the sensation of a whirling spiral fall. Then the viewports opened and one could look out at the stars. In overdrive there is nothing to see, of course. Cygnus flamed and flared in monstrous silence, far away. Kilmer stood staring out.

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"Queer," said a voice behind Kilmer, "that you get to take a planetfall for granted."

"There's not much difference between them," said Kilmer. "Even the bars outside the space-port—"

He turned his head. The sandy-haired man grinned. Carol, beside him, smiled very faintly. Her father'd been talking to her. Kilmer flushed and said, "Sorry," but the sandy-haired man nodded.

"Carry on," he said pleasantly. "Even the bars outside the space port—"

"They're all alike," said Kilmer. "You go ashore, inside the landing-grid. There's cargo to land and cargo to take aboard. Maybe you've time for a drink at one of the joints outside the space-port. Then you're due back on the ship. And the landing-grid lifts you and you're gone again. And that's all you see of a brand-new world."

"I thought," said the girl's father, "that I was getting insensitive, arriving at new planets and not being thrilled."

"To a passenger," Kilmer suggested, "space-travel must be like travelling by tube-train. There are no windows while you travel, and only the stations when you stop, and the stations are all alike. But if you were running the train it would be different. This is my first trip as a passenger."

The sandy-haired man glanced at his daughter.

"It might be interesting to get a spaceman's view of things. For instance—"

"I'd like to know," said the girl, "why it seems to take almost as long to get to a landing, after you come out of overdrive, as it does to go between stars."

Kilmer explained, and she listened, watching his face. Her father seemed pleased that she'd entered into conversation. When, long hours later, the ship came to ground, Kilmer took them to the landing-grid control building and showed them how a spaceport worked.

There wasn't much freight for Cygnus III. They were back on the ship, and it was lifting again, within an hour.

The ship stopped again at Mele, and Tralee, and Sandria. On Mele, Kilmer took the two of them to a Lipo joint just outside the landing-grid. One didn't find Lipos much nearer to Earth than Mele. Not yet. They were spreading slowly from their home planet, always polite, always inoffensive, and always passionately enthusiastic about human civilization. This Lipo joint had an intricately machined metallic exterior, a gadgety animated sign, and bright lights flicking off and on even in the daytime. Lipos loved human devices. Their ideas of diversion were peculiar. To most people their music was an unholy row, but some liked it very much.

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He took Carol ashore again on Tralee and yet again on Sandria. They were good friends by then. It appeared, surprisingly, that she and her father were bound for Galatea, too. Madison, Carol's father, knew that they would have to change ships at Samara, and that a good connection was dubious. He casually explained the reason for their journey to Kilmer.

"There've been ships turning up missing, out here, and two of them were mine. Their loss just about wiped me out financially. And being wiped out caused Carol some bad disillusionment—to her friends, being poor was a crime. I brought her along to take her mind off it while I found out what happened to my ships."

"The Patrol," said Kilmer with some irony, "says there's no one cause. Several ships missing is a series of coincidences."

Madison nodded.

"Yes. I want to know what's wrong. It's not only the money. Those ships had crews on them. My crews. I want to know how they died and why. If it was accident, that's one thing, but if the trouble was with the ships, that's my fault. In either case, I mean to see that something's done."

"I've been a year on Earth," said Kilmer, "working in a robot factory, to try to find out for myself how a ship's robots could let anything happen that would kill the crew."

Madison nodded. He showed no surprise.

"You knew it?" asked Kilmer.

Madison nodded. "When my ships disappeared I naturally got all the information I could—so I know about your testimony. And then when Carol was able to be friendly with you, I was interested in who you were. The passenger-list told me. . . . And I wondered if you hadn't gone to work in a robot factory to find something out." Then he said casually, "Did you?"

"I found out that a robot could kill a human," said Kilmer grimly. "But not how in these cases it happened."

"I'd like to know," Madison observed. "The supposedly certain thing about robots is that they can't directly harm a human being, they can't do anything that will indirectly harm a human, and they can't stand by and let a human be harmed." He paused. "Considering the nature of robots, the *Thetis* couldn't do what you said it did."

"I agree," said Kilmer dourly, "that my story was unlikely."

Madison nodded.

"That doesn't matter. What does is, was it true?"

"It was," said Kilmer.

"What happened?"

"I can't tell you," said Kilmer. "There's one step missing in the process of robots turning murderer. Until I find it—"

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"You're going on from Samara with the yacht you're delivering," said Madison. "It may have to go on its own drive. Could its robots get murderous?"

"I don't see how they could," Kilmer told him grimly. "But I don't see how any of the missing ships' could, either. I know what could happen, but not how."

Carol appeared. She said uncomfortably;

"It's almost breakout time for Samara. I hate breakout!"

"So does everybody," said her father. "We're talking about missing ships. I think Kilmer thinks you ought not to go on to Galatea."

A gong sounded loudly through all the ship's loud-speakers. A voice said: *"Breakout in ten seconds. Nine. Eight. Seven—"*

The wrenching, disturbing sensation came. Carol opened her eyes and swallowed. Then she said, "I'm going, of course. I'll make sure our baggage is ready."

Madison and Carol went on to a hotel in Samara's space-port city while the *Endor* was unloaded, and Kilmer checked in with his custody-credentials at the space-port office. There he learned that there was no other ship due for a Samara-Galatea run within two months of standard calendar.

But there were orders about the *Endor*. She was to be checked and serviced and driven to her destination. Kilmer presented his master's ticket—it had not been lifted two years before—and waited to see if the robot checker threw it out. It didn't.

"You can't check out before noon tomorrow," said the space-port clerk. "The owner's orders are for full standard supplies and a complete check of equipment plus data-plates for all runs in this area. Make it noon?"

Kilmer went out and headed for the line of sleazy resorts just outside the landing-grid. There was a Joe's Place, and an Overdrive Drinkery, and a Winkie's—there was a Winkie, usually blonde, outside nearly every space-port in the galaxy—and a Lipo joint and half a dozen eating-places.

Kilmer went into Joe's Place. It was empty at the moment. He bought a drink. The bartender wrinkled his forehead.

"You've been in here before," he said.

Kilmer nodded. "But not in two years. I've been back on Earth. What's new?"

The bartender shrugged.

Kilmer said, "When I left there'd been a lot of missing ships. Did the Patrol find out what was going on?"

The bartender shook his head. "A tramp went missing six months past," he said. "No news of it at all. Two months ago there was something. Not around here, though. A freezer-ship, with fancy

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grub from Earth. Nobody knows what happened. People talk. Some still say pirates. Some say Lipos. But Lipos are pretty quiet fellas, and it couldn't be pirates. What else is there?"

"That's right, what else?"

The bartender said, "I doubt the Patrol's thinkin' about missing ships right now! What happened over on Galatea's news, come to think of it. When robots fight humans that's something to think about."

Kilmer tensed. "Give," he said.

There'd been a ship over on Galatea that was to be junked. It was put in a junking-cradle and wrecker-robots went to work on it. They'd carved away the back half of the hull, all the drive, and much equipment. Then some robot electrotechnicians went in the control-room to remove the operative robots there . . . and the plunger-relays in the skeletonized engine-room suddenly flicked home for full-power emergency drive. Simultaneously, the ship's gravity-relays cut out. The fire-extinguishing gas-nozzles opened wide and the bleeder-valves—more important on a space-ship than kingston valves in an ocean liner—opened, too. Instantly, the drive relays reversed for twenty-gee deceleration and the yaw-controls flung the ship wildly about. The part, the remnant, the amputated fragment of a ship began to fight wildly.

But for the carving already made, the ship would have plunged ahead at twenty gravities acceleration with no ship-gravity to balance it. In space, any human being in the ship would have been flung against the floor with twenty times his own weight crushing him. The fire-extinguishing gas tanks—they had been taken away—would have flooded the ship's interior with deadly, strangling stuff. The drive would then have reversed and flung any person in the ship against the ship's ceilings with a twenty-gee impact, then the bleeder-valves would have let all the ship's air out to space and then the drive would have reversed, and re-reversed, and reversed again. No human could live through such a battering, even in a space-suit. Nobody could have lived, at all.

The doomed carcass of a ship—so the bartender told Kilmer—fought blindly against destruction. Then men entered it to stop its incredible behavior—robots cannot harm men. But a man essayed to pass through an inner-bulkhead door. It slammed on him and crushed him. Other men, unbelieving, barked orders. The ship's servo-robots homed on their voices and battered into them. Two men were dead and others badly injured.

Wrecker-robots had to cut into the control-room with torches, and then burn the ship's integrator-robot across and across and actu-

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ally burn its Massie brain-units to stinking crusts before it stopped trying its best to do murder.

Kilmer could visualize it completely—he'd seen the *Thetis* do in space what this mutilated hulk had tried to do in a junkyard.

He found Madison and Carol at their hotel, told them about the junkyard battle.

"But—it doesn't make sense!" protested Madison. "It acted as if it were alive, you say! But if it were alive, why did it wait until it was halfway dismembered? If it wasn't alive—"

"Look," said Kilmer. "Are you bound to go to Galatea?"

"I am, more than ever," said Madison angrily. "But Carol—"

Carol said, "We'll go with you. When?"

"We'll lift off about noon," said Kilmer.

On the way back to the port, Kilmer found himself still unsatisfied.

He went into the now-stuffy, new-smelling ship and activated her power unit. He set the air-freshener apparatus to work, locked the outside port, and put on approach alarms to notify him if anybody approached her on the outside. Then he went over her from bow to stern.

He checked each item of her equipment, and investigated all the small hiding-places for devices which would later be energized by wires already installed. He couldn't guess what those devices would be, but he made sure that none existed now.

Then he spent an hour on a very small, simple device which should never come into operation.

He was alert during the evening and the night, and he watched during the official check-over of equipment next morning. He was present at every action and every instant. When Carol and her father came aboard, Kilmer would have staked his life that the *Endor* was the safest of spaceships for Carol to journey to Galatea in.

It would have been a bad bet.

The ground dropped slowly away. The force-fields of the landing-grid held the *Endor* firmly and she rose and rose and rose.

The sky darkened and the ground was hazy. Samara seemed a vast bowl, and the ship continued to rise, and suddenly the horizon was curved and the sky became black with shining specks which were stars.

Then the *Endor* appeared not so much to be rising from the planet as to be moving away from it. Samara became a ball on which seas and continents were to be seen, and those polar icecaps which almost invariably turn up in the third-from-the-sun position in every Sol-type solar system.

The gentle upward push ended. Kilmer, at the control-desk, flipped a switch and the yacht's own artificial gravity jolted on.

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Everything felt suddenly normal, though the *Endor* had now no link whatever with any solidity anywhere.

"We're five diameters out, now," said Kilmer. "We have a data-plate which programs the robots to take us to Galatea. I watched it put in this morning. We've other data-plates for other space-ports, we've food for months and fuel for years. I think—" he smiled—"I think it's safe to attempt the three-day run to Galatea."

Carol smiled in return. He pressed the actuator knob. The ship's integrator-robot picked up an operating program from the data-plate for Galatea. It performed the pre-computation check all high-grade robots perform between the reception of an order and its execution. It acted. The *Endor* swung briskly in space. It steadied, and Kilmer—who had qualified as master in this area of space—Kilmer abruptly looked surprised.

Before he could move or speak, however, a relay clicked shut. There was the sensation of twisting fall and dizziness and a temporary nausea. The viewports went black. The *Endor* was in overdrive, rushing toward its destination at a high multiple of the velocity of light. There was no sound. There was no vibration. There was no feeling of motion. If one judged by sensation alone, the *Endor* was as likely to be buried immovably in the core of a rocky planet as to be in motion in unthinkable emptiness.

Kilmer said, "That's queer—"

"What?" asked Madison.

"As I remember," said Kilmer uneasily, "Galatea lies to the galactic north of Samara. The coordinates were something like seventy-eight declination and eighty-something right ascension. I won't swear to the right ascension, but anybody can tell where the galactic poles are!"

"I can't," said Madison. He smiled. But Kilmer looked extremely uncomfortable.

"I think—" said Kilmer, "it's ridiculous, but—"

He threw the manual overdrive control to the "Off" position. The wrenching sensations repeated. Then the *Endor* was in normal space. There were stars outside the ports. The sun Cygnus was a bright speck, no more. Kilmer painstakingly verified its galactic latitude and longitude. It wasn't where it should be, relative to the *Endor* and the *Endor*'s presumed course.

"I made a mistake," Kilmer said. "I wasn't suspicious enough. The *Endor* was picked to join the fleet of missing ships. I didn't realize it. I'm sorry."

"I suppose," said Madison, "that something can be done about it. I hope you found it out in time!"

"I did," said Kilmer. "I think."

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He opened a cupboard beside the control-desk. He brought out weapons. He handed one to Madison and one to Carol.

"This may be an extreme of caution," he said curtly, "but I don't want to be unsuspicious again!"

He started for the door. Madison said sharply:

"Hold it! What could we need to shoot at?"

"Robots," said Kilmer savagely. "Oh. Don't shoot at a viewport. We're in space."

He glared at the main integrator, that unimpressive-looking but incredible central computer-complex which received all orders throughout the ship and sorted them into programmed sequences which it directed to the proper executing mechanism. It also received all data from the ship's sensing devices and routed them where they should go.

Kilmer left the room, stuffing a blast-pistol into his pocket. Carol stared at her father.

"What's happened?"

"I'm not sure," said Madison. "I thought I knew something about men, I believed Kilmer was all right. But at the moment I'm not sure of anything."

There was the snapping report of a blast-pistol somewhere in the ship. Madison jumped. Moments later, another. Then a third. A speaker clicked, and Kilmer's voice came out of it.

"I'm not fighting anything," it said briefly. "I'm just smashing some robot devices. Don't worry."

The speaker clicked off. Madison and Carol waited tensely in the control-room. There were more shots. Presently Kilmer reappeared.

"The ship in the junkyard," he said coldly, "turned on fire-extinguishing gas throughout its hull. I've just welded all the gas-nozzles shut with my blaster so that can't be done to us. The same ship opened its bleeder-valves to let all its air out to space. I welded this ship's shut, against that possibility. Incidentally, I cut the circuits that could make them open." Then he added, "Last night I got nervous and put a high-gee cutout in the power line. So we won't be battered to death by twenty-gee plunges."

Madison said quietly, "I could do with a little information."

"It was arranged," Kilmer said, "for us not to arrive at Galatea. You know how we started out—I put a data-plate for the run between Samara and Galatea in the robot controls. All the data plates were put on board this morning. I watched. And the loading robot put on a false plate while I watched."

Madison said, "If the ship's equipment has been tampered with, the thing to do is turn back to Samara, isn't it?"

"To the landing-grid where the

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tampering was done?" asked Kilmer. "Where at most we might catch one man while those who loot the murdered ships can find out in time and get away? And where the man who did the tampering might handle the grid to let us down to ground?"

Carol said, "He's right. We shouldn't go back."

"There've been people murdered in this business," said Kilmer. "I don't think a robot brain has come alive and started an undercover war against humans—I think it's a human trick. Piracy on a huge scale."

"Why pick this ship?" asked Madison. "There's no money—"

"The ship itself!" raged Kilmer suddenly.

The *Endor* had been specially built for very special performances. She could go anywhere in the galaxy in safety and comfort and at astonishingly high speeds. The man or men who possessed the *Endor* could load her with riches he'd gotten from ships brought to some rendezvous by robots, and go far beyond the range of any ordinary private ship. He could go to where rumors of missing ships, and fear of pursuits, would never follow.

"What do we do, then?" asked Madison.

"We want to get to Galatea and report to the Patrol," Kilmer told him. "To get there, we'll have to go somewhere else first—anywhere that we can land and get a proper data-plate, and incidentally leave word behind us."

He turned to the specialized devices intended to handle the ship under supervision of one man only. They were robots, because they received orders and consulted "memories" for the information needed and carried the orders out. And they were robots because they were designed so that they could not directly harm nor indirectly injure nor stand aside inactive while a human being was hurt.

Kilmer removed the Galatea data-plate—which was in a sense a memory-storage device—and put in another which should take the *Endor* to Normin. He pressed the survey-button. The integrator examined the data, stored it, and its programming circuits linked. Then it computed the exact consequences of the obedience of each of the parts of the entire command. When and if the calculated consequences matched the command, an "order-will-be-fulfilled" signal was established. Such a safety-device was necessary—you couldn't have a robot attempting an order it could not complete. A robot must not attempt the impossible.

The light glowed to tell him the ship was prepared to obey his command. It should flick into overdrive and come out in four days' time within a certain number of hundreds of millions of

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miles of a planet from which one ship had already disappeared.

Kilmer pressed the "execute" button. The ship responded smoothly. The *Endor* swung briskly. There was that excessively unpleasant combination of spiral plummeting and dizziness and upchuck urge. Then there was silence, and the vision-ports were dark, and the *Endor* was on its way.

Not quite four hours later the overdrive field broke with no warning whatever. Then the *Endor* leaped horribly, at intolerable acceleration—

An hour later, somewhat battered, Kilmer completed a new check-over of the ship. Many of the ship's capabilities had been removed. Servorobots were no longer ready to serve meals or perform other minor housekeeping duties. They were cut off from all sources of power. Door-robots which opened doors when a human wished to pass through, were now unable to function.

"We're back to the times," said Madison," when a man literally steered his ship night and day, and if you hadn't had that high-gee cut-out in place, so the power cut off when it started to do murder, we wouldn't be here at all."

"The question still is," said Kilmer, "how can a robot do murder. It's mindless. It remembers, it acts, it starts, and it stops. But it doesn't think! It mustn't harm anything human. But do you know how it knows what it mustn't allow to be harmed?"

Madison struggled with the problem. Carol said, "We have an idea of what a human is, and when something matches it . . ."

"Robots don't have ideas," said Kilmer." They can't. No idea can be written down. We can only write down symbols which remind us of ideas. A robot can match temperatures, sizes, colors, weights, radiation—anything that affects a sensing unit. But it can't match 'human' to anything."

"For some centuries," insisted Madison, "robots have never harmed a human. Why?"

"They pick up a signal," said Kilmer. "Robots are set to pick up a blend of brain-waves and heartbeats—or the electric currents involved in heartbeats—and the hydraulic sounds made by blood flowing through veins and arteries. We can't know that signal, because we're submerged in it all our lives. But when a robot picks up that combination coming from an object, it classes the object as 'human' and knows it mustn't be harmed.

"I finish my lecture," he said, "by telling you how to make a robot into a murderer. You turn off the apparatus that receives that special signal. That's all. When a robot doesn't receive that signal, it doesn't consider that there are hu-

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mans around. It obeys orders. If things get in the way, it smashes them. They may be two-legged or warm or moving or anything you please, but if the robot doesn't 'hear' that special signal, they aren't human. And the two data-plates we've tried to run this ship with—somehow they cut that signal off!"

Carol drew a quick breath.

"And you think the others—"

"Just so," said Kilmer grimly. "They will do the same. Which puts us in a very beautiful fix!"

Carol stared at him.

"What?"

He swept his hand across the vision-ports, through which could be seen a thousand million stars of different brightness, of every tint and color the eye can recognize.

"We're well out between the stars," said Kilmer. "Which one is which, and where do we go from here, and how?"

He left the control-room. Carol looked after him. Her father paced irritably up and down the not over-long compartment.

"I thought," said Madison, "that I had reason for cynicism and discouragement some time ago. I rather prided myself that I didn't give way to them. But Kilmer, damn him! does give way to them and points out every possible morbid fact, and then carries on as if he were optimistic! What do you make of him, Carol?"

Carol looked confused. Then she considered, and her color changed a little. As her father regarded her with discomforting attention, she flushed.

"Ah," said her father. "That! When things looked bad, back on Earth, I told you that life would become interesting again. But this is the devil of a time to discover it! Things look bad, my dear!"

"He'll do something!" said Carol confidently.

"Perhaps you don't realize," said Madison, "how beautifully we're involved. We can drive at many times the speed of light, provided we don't try to look where we're going. Or we can travel at what will ultimately amount to some thousands of miles per second and see where we are headed, but it will take us lifetimes to get there. And we haven't food for a lifetime of travel at a mere few thousand miles per second."

Kilmer came back, carrying a brass-barreled instrument which set up at a port.

"I'm going to pick a sol-type sun by its spectrum," he observed, "and head for it in brief jumps by overdrive. Manual stuff. Ridiculously inefficient. The odds will be against it having an occupied planet. If it hasn't, we try again."

"I said you'd do something!" said Carol triumphantly. "We're well off for food too, aren't we?"

"Maybe two months," said Kilmer.

"And of course you can find a

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planet with people by then!"

"We may," he said. "But the odds are at least twenty to one against it. There are a lot of sol-type suns. Not all the planets are occupied."

He focussed the instrument, made adjustments, read off the answer. He changed the direction and did the same thing again. A third time.

"That's a sol-type sun," he said curtly. "If it's the same size as Sol, it's not over ten lights away. It's probably not over fifteen or under five."

He busied himself with innumerable adjustments of the ship's controls. Presently he pressed a button, and they went into overdrive.

A long while later the gong sounded. Another queasy, nauseating, dizzy instant, and there swam into view before them a vividly bright star which was not near enough to have a visible disk, but was definitely the brightest object in the heavens.

Kilmer measured its brightness.

"Just about the size of Sol," he reported," and ten lights was almost exact.

The next was a very short hop indeed—they went into and out of overdrive so swiftly that the two sensations overlapped. Kilmer himself was shaken and half-stunned by the violent physical effect of so quick a reversal of the overdrive field. Madison looked as if he'd been hit with something heavy. He gasped for breath for minutes.

Carol was prostrated by the shock. It was half an hour before she could protest convincingly that she was quite all right.

They'd passed the sol-type star, even so, but it was relatively very near. Its disk was distinct, and they could even see the monstrous, slowly writhing prominences at its edges.

They drove for the third world, which appeared to have the usual polar icecaps of third-planets of sol-type suns. And when they reached it a week later and went into a low orbit to search for possible cities and landing-grid, the first thing that happened was that a standard Patrol-type guided missile came up within a quarter-mile of the *Endor* and stayed there, matching speed and orbit perfectly. It would, of course, be carrying a camera to relay down to the ground what its lenses could see of the space-yacht.

After a long moment, Kilmer said, "This is where those data-plates would have brought us, after we were murdered—that missile has to be from the missing Patrol ship. . . . And it has us—we're much too close in to go into overdrive . . ."

The radio came alive, and a suave voice from the ground said, *"The Endor, eh? Very glad to see you. How does she handle?"*

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"What planet's this?" demanded Kilmer.

"This planet?" The voice seemed amused. *"I call it Barataria. Historical analogy, you see. It's a private world. There's nobody here but my servants and myself. You're the man from Phipps, aren't you? The man responsible for delivery?"*

"Yes," said Kilmer savagely. Now he had to think fast. "Look here! I lifted this ship from Samara with a data-plate for Galatea. But this isn't Galatea! I came out of overdrive here! What the hell happened?"

The voice changed. It was relieved.

"A human error," it said *smoothly. "Barataria and Galatea sound alike. When somebody indexed a plate they mistook an unfamiliar name for a familiar one. You were supposed to come down here. Bring the Endor in. You'll pick up the beacon shortly. I've no grid so you'll have to land on rockets. You'll see scorchings on the near side of a triangular island shortly. That's the place."*

The communicator clicked off. There'd been no threats—the man on the ground was probably guessing that the *Endor's* robots hadn't responded to the signal which should have turned off their ability to recognize humans. A late-model robot might be immobilized altogether if it turned off its human-signal receiver, and therefore would not turn off its receiver because a robot doesn't turn itself off. Yes . . . He'd guess that Kilmer had arrived with no hint of robots instructed to murder. He'd expect Kilmer to be upset, and perhaps suspicious, but not truly warned. Still—

"What are you going to do?" asked Carol in a whisper.

"Start down," said Kilmer grimly, "and let that missile go on overhead, at orbital speed. When it's around at the other side of the planet I'll try to make space before it can get back."

He watched the near-objects radar to check what the missile did. He flicked on the standard-frequency beacon receiver. It picked up a monotonous *"beep . . . beep . . . beep . . ."* and the dial showed the line exactly.

He killed the *Endor's* speed. Once the beacon changed its note to *"beep-u-beep . . . beep-be-beep"* to say he was too high. He killed more speed. The radar showed the missile from the missing Patrol ship going on ahead.

The horizon changed to ocean, and blue water flowed toward him from far away. The cloud-cover was spotty, and he saw the island. It was triangular. It was still many, many miles ahead . . .

The radar showed an object coming leisurely from behind. It was in orbit. It was a second missile from the missing Patrol ship.

Kilmer sagged. If there were

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two, there would be more. It would after all be natural for a man who almost single-handedly raided the space-lanes without ever lifting off ground to think about defense of himself and his treasure. And he now had plenty of Patrol missiles to maintain a virtual umbrella of them over his headquarters.

"There's—another missile," whispered Carol desperately. "What now?"

Kilmer wet his lips.

"There's no need for many men aground. There's reason for there to be very few. If the *Endor* is an escape ship, it could even be that there is only one man down there. I'll pretend I'm indignant about the blunder at Samara. I'll insist that the owner prove who he is before I turn over the ship and give him his instructions. He doesn't need the instructions, but may play along to make sure suspicion is avoided . . ."

Carol caught her breath.

"And whenever it's possible," said Kilmer fiercely, "I'll kill as many of them as I can! I may even get them all!"

Carol made an inarticulate small sound.

"Madison!" said Kilmer. "You and Carol hide. Let them break in—and open on them with your blast-rifles when you've the best chance to wipe them out. You may get all I don't . . . I can't plan beyond that."

The island enlarged before and below him. He saw rocket-blast markings on the soil of a burned-clear area. Farther on, there was a graceful, sprawling, comfortable house fronting on the blue sea.

The rockets roared, and their flames splashed, and gigantic clouds of smoke and steam arose on every hand as the *Endor* landed.

Kilmer said in a matter-of-fact voice:

"I'm going out. Sorry I invited you to ride to Galatea, Carol. To tell the truth, I was—I am pretty romantic about you. I'm afraid I've gotten the two of you in a very bad spot—but we still have a chance. Remember what I said!"

The last was to Madison. Carol kissed Kilmer fiercely and then stood aside as he went out the ship's port.

The smoke and steam from the rockets was still thick. He closed the exit-port behind him and moved through the vaporous stuff over hot and steaming soil.

Something fell from the sky upon him—a net, which closed like a purse and drew tight. He couldn't even get at the blaster in his pocket.

Two Lipos appeared, solemn-faced and enigmatic like all their tribe. Silently, they picked Kilmer up and carried him toward the house.

"You don't find it amusing?"

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asked the suave voice regretfully.

Kilmer's blaster lay on a table within plain view. He was seated in a chair, and there was a glass of colored liquid beside him. The other man in the room beamed. He was older than Kilmer, but not by many years. He was dressed in clothing that could have come from nowhere but Earth, and he looked natty in those crisply tailored habiliments. One would not look to see the only human on a planet dressed so finely, Kilmer thought—but then a man who committed multiple murder by proxy and had evolved a fantastic and fantastically successful modern method of piracy might be expected to be unusual.

"Not the least bit amusing?" repeated the voice.

"No," said Kilmer dogmatically. "I didn't like it."

He'd been brought to the house by the Lipos, like a rolled-up rug or a netted fish. The man had pressed something and the net came gradually free. But the Lipos removed Kilmer's blaster before his hands were loose. His captor, then, had laughed cheerfully and given him a drink.

"I admit it was rough," said the man of the island, "but it was amusing! There's nobody on the planet but four Lipos and myself, and it's deadly tedious! I had to do something, so I invented that. I've caught the Lipos in it often. They're afraid of it—and me!"

"I didn't like it," said Kilmer.

"Too bad!" said the other man mournfully. "By the way. The Lipos took your blaster. There it is. Why don't you take it back?"

"No," said Kilmer.

The man was disappointed. But he waved his hand. There was a rippling of the table-top. The blaster vanished.

"Clever?"

"I don't care for jokes," said Kilmer grimly.

"You're annoying me," complained the man across the room. But his eyes were very bright and anticipating.

Kilmer sniffed. "You say you're Enkhard and the *Endor* is yours. So why catch me in a silly trap for a joke? I don't like jokes! Now, if you're Enkhard, suppose you prove it and give me a receipt and tell me how I'm going to get to a proper space-port and back to Earth."

The other man stared.

"But you're not going back to Earth," he said pleasantly. "I'm going to kill you."

Kilmer said impatiently;

"Where's your proof that you're Enkhard? You act to me like a crazy practical joker. I'm not in the mood for jokes!"

"You don't believe me?" asked the man, staring.

Kilmer shrugged.

"You'd be wiser," said the other man angrily," to be scared!"

Then Kilmer knew what this

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other man wanted. He'd killed many people, but not in person. He'd committed enormities, but through robots. And now he wanted to be assured that he could do, in person, what he'd made robots do. He meant—he craved—to see himself as triumphant and merciless, rather than hiding and taking what robots obediently brought him.

"I'll be obliged," Kilmer snapped, "if you'll stop talking nonsense. Are you Enkhard? If so, prove it. Else I'm going back to the ship and—"

"I doubt it," said the other man. "Listen to me! Have you heard of space-ships missing around these worlds? Talk of piracy?"

"There can't be pirates," said Kilmer with an effect of the extreme of irritation. "It's nonsense!"

"I'm a pirate," said the other man. "I've taken eighteen ships. There's not a man or woman or child left alive that was on them! I took a Patrol ship, and the missiles in orbit were what it had to defend itself with! I took what I wanted from the ships I took. Then I let them go overboard. Within half a mile out yonder there are eighteen ships, tightly sealed, lying on the ocean bottom. I took them. Alone! I've everything precious they carried on board! Now—after I've told you that, do you think I'll let you go? I'm going to kill you!"

"All right, all right!" said Kilmer, illhumoredly. "If you've got to talk nonsense there must be somebody around who'll tell me where I am and make some sense—"

The other man seemed to pale. He touched something. Doors opened, cupboards snapped small panels wide. Things shifted. Kilmer looked into the muzzles of a dozen blasters. They appeared from the walls and even the ceiling. The upholstered chair-arms beside him swelled and stirred.

"Well?" said the other man.

"They look like blasters," said Kilmer, peevishly. "If they are, it's damned stupid. They might go off! If they're not it's just another silly joke."

The other man stood up. He laid his hand on the table that had held Kilmer's blaster. The surface rippled, and he had it in his hand.

"I'll show you something else, he said harshly. "Come along!"

He waved Kilmer before him with the muzzle of Kilmer's own weapon. Kilmer—with a considerable effort of will—wore an air of fretful condescension.

"To the right," said the other man. "Down the steps. To that building yonder."

"I'm humoring you," said Kilmer peevishly.

"Open that door," ordered the other man furiously. "Open it!"

Kilmer opened it. It was a com-

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monplace, metal-walled storage building, such as householders keep tools and garden-hoses in. But its contents were unbelievable.

There were pigs of platinum and bulk irridium. There were jewels cast negligently, wine-bottles from Earth and stacked-up paper currency and coarse cloth bags with the rounded projections of coins making them bulge.

"Well?" said the man in a steely voice.

Kilmer looked, and then he gave a short, perfunctory, humoring laugh.

"All right," he said tolerantly. "You have things that look like blasters sticking out of walls. You have a thing like a net to jump on people and tie them up. You like to astonish people. You live all alone on this planet, and there can't be much to do but astonish people. All right, I'm astonished. Now will you get to business?"

"You—don't believe it!" said the other man incredulously. "You don't—" He cried savagely, "Listen to me! I got at one robot in the space-port on Galatea! One robot! I made it switch data-plates that I made for official ones, when it checked ships' equipment. And I've taken eighteen ships with that one robot and the other robots it's taken over for me! Eighteen ships! One was a Patrol ship! This is the loot I took from them, after I'd killed them! All! Every one of them! And now—and this you had *better* believe—I am going to kill you."

"Sure!" said Kilmer humorously. "So you want me to be scared of you. All right. I'm scared. This theatre-stuff—"

The other man caught his breath.

"You had better be scared—." He moved quickly into the building. "This is *real.* I am not a crazy hermit." He tugged at a pig of platinum.

"Feel this!" he ordered. "Feel the weight of it! Platinum!" Kilmer smiled condescendingly and strolled over casually.

And stumbled, lurched toward the man, then leaped, and snatched his blaster from the man's hand.

The other snatched for his own, but Kilmer pulled trigger first. He held it back. The other man had been dead for many seconds before Kilmer, still shaking with hatred, released the trigger.

"The Lipos," he told Madison, back in the *Endor,* "we'll leave here. They say a tramp comes by every so often and leaves supplies. The Patrol will be here before it gets back. We'll leave the loot here too. We don't want to wait and load it. And they can't take it away."

Madison said doubtfully, "The missiles?"

"I've smashed the controls," Kilmer assured him.

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Madison frowned, canvassing things to be thought of. Carol shivered suddenly and said, "But —how did you know—about him?"

Kilmer drew a deep breath.

"He wanted to kill somebody," said Kilmer uncomfortably. "He'd caused the death of plenty, but he'd never killed anybody himself. He wanted to. He needed me dead anyhow, but that wasn't really the point any more—he had to kill for the pure sake of killing, in part at least to prove to himself that he had really killed all those others . . . Imagine what it was like to sit here—all alone on this planet—outwitting and plundering the galaxy, in a sense, and nobody to impress, or to frighten. He wanted, I think, more than anything the sense of power—the power of a king . . . the absolute power of life and death. And he could not have that feeling unless the man he was going to kill showed clearly that he was aware of that power, and terrified of it. He was so eager for me to believe him that he forgot everything else. . . . If it had gone on another two minutes, he'd have won —I couldn't have pretended longer."

He remembered pulling the trigger, and he began to shake.

She walked into his arms.

Presently her father said;

"Eighteen ships, sealed tight, in the ocean right offshore. That'll be a salvage job! I ought to get more than my two lost ships out of it, considering I'll get them first. And—"

He turned. He stared. Then he said annoyedly:

"Kilmer—Carol, there'll be time for that kind of thing when we're headed for Galatea. . . .

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To some of you, this will be a farrago of fustian futtock shrouds; to others—those of you with whom they *have had at least brushwing contact—there may be offered here a grain of hope: you are not, after all, alone . . .*

FOUR DAYS IN THE CORNER

by Winona McClintic

McDERMOTT HAD DREAMED that he was a child again, and they had told him to stand in the corner. He was always bad in these dreams, and spilled ink on the manuscript. He could not bear to put himself in the corner because of the hole in it. It was such a bad dream that he woke himself up. He was sweating and his heart was pounding, so Grania woke up, too.

"Which one was it?" she asked. Granis never dreamed.

"The corner one," McDermott said; "I'll have to go and move the car. They don't like it to be left in the middle of the garage."

"We were in a hurry last night," Grania reminded him, "otherwise, we wouldn't have parked it there. They ought to know that."

"They don't care," McDermott said. He went down in his bathrobe to the garage, There was a vacancy in the corner now, so he moved the car into it. The garage sighed with relief when the corners stopped tickling. The doors opened as McDermott stepped into the lift and went up again to his apartment.

"It's quiet now," he told Grania. She sighed, too, and they went back to sleep. The building breathed freely during the rest of the night. They did not make the structure nervous when they were pleased. In spite of that, McDermott had to spend the rest of the night in the corner. "Discipline," they said, "and Revenge! It was Waldeyer's Ring!"

It was a gray day, raining heavily. McDermott took the streetcar, which was only slightly haunted, to the office. He sat in the corner of the smoking section where the wind blew the rain on his hat and trenchcoat all the way.

"Good morning, Miss Bliss," he said to his secretary, who was having her first cup of coffee. She had a pot of ivy on her desk.

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"Good morning, Mr McDermott," said Miss Bliss. "Would you like a cup?" She followed him into the inner office, carrying his coffee.

"You look tired, Mr McDermott," Miss Bliss said, politely.

"Thank you, Miss Bliss," McDermott said, taking the cup, knowing what it would taste like. She closed the door behind her, and he sipped the studge. Same taste as food and cigarettes. They had made him stop smoking his pipe.

McDermott had moved his desk to the first corner of the office, as a precaution. The racks of pipes were left on the bookcase, and he watched them, sometimes for minutes at a time, but they never moved. Work had become such an automatic routine that he no longer thought about what he was doing. Business seemed to be much as usual. Miss Bliss's casualness was proof that his "trouble" did not show too much. That afternoon he sold the car to a dealer whose smile was so wide his tonsils showed. The contents of the glove compartment went too.

When McDermott got home that night Grania was worried.

"They left some of their old bones in the corner today," she said; "mouldy ones."

"They're getting restless," McDermott said. "It's a bad sign. They will probably send an agent around, soon."

"Would he look like them?" Grania asked. "I don't think they'd dare. They don't like to come out of the corners, anyway. It's too open."

"There's no telling what sort of agent they could get," McDermott said, smoking studge. "Probably someone who looks like us. To fool us."

"There would be something slightly wrong about him, like a floppy hat," Grania said, "Because people like us wouldn't be their agents. We must be careful."

They read books in bed until they were too sleepy to stay awake. Grania did not know what his dreams were, but she felt him stirring and heard him groaning in the night and it woke her up.

They had sent him back to high school to make up the term of physical education he had missed the year he had the lymphoid tissue in his throat. So they started him at the top of the ivy-covered building, ten stories up and about a mile long, and made him walk down each flight and along the corridor to the stairway at the other end. Carrying the manuscript in question, he passed miles of lockers in rows, gray and gleaming, in a silent building. No one else was there until he was halfway through his pilgrimage to the class he had missed. Suddenly, the rooms he passed were peopled with low voices and the sounds of forced learning. Grania woke him

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up as he walked on the third or second floor—he had lost count.

"They have no right to make you take the whole four years over again, just because of one gym class," she said, outraged; "it wasn't that important."

"They'll take away my bachelor's degree if I don't do it," McDermott said.

"It wouldn't matter any more," Grania said. "You own the business and you're married. Why do you need the degree?"

"I don't need it," McDermott said, "but they wouldn't remove it without humiliating me publicly. Just four months of this and I'll have made up the course. If I get an "A" in it, I'll have a "C" average."

They finally went back to sleep. Whatever McDermott dreamed the rest of the night, he remembered nothing of it except the voices from the corner informing him, "Miss Thea Phlebom will call tomorrow."

He mentioned this to Grania in the morning.

"Sounds like a lady exterminator," she said. "I'll be ready."

McDermott had to go without lunch because the restaurant, crowded with refugees from the rain, had no vacant table except along the second side of the room. There was no place to sit in the corners. He walked back through the rain to the office and to the horror of Miss Bliss's message.

"A Miss Thea Phlebom called and will call again," she told him, as she put on her hat to go.

"What did she look like?" McDermott asked, hoping for a clue.

"She was wearing a floppy hat," Miss Bliss said, "she was very genteel."

"Hah," thought McDermott. He went into his office and sat in the chair in the second corner, staring at the rain-streaked window. He heard Miss Bliss return, and a moment later, a strange, genteel voice making inquiries. Miss Bliss knocked at his door.

"Miss Thea Phlebom to see you, Mr McDermott," she said musically. McDermott hid in the closet. The door opened, he heard Miss Bliss's astonishment pouring out of her eyes, and the door closed again. He decided to go home early, and walked past the baffled Miss Bliss, who told him that a lady had come upon business.

"Thank you, Miss Bliss," McDermott said, closing the door. He might have known Miss Bliss once before; she could have changed her name.

"Goodnight, Mr McDermott," she said, putting her hat on. No point staying in an empty office.

McDermott was hungry even for studge when he got home.

"Phlebom show up here today?" he asked Grania, as he hung his wet trenchcoat on the rack, "wearing a floppy hat?"

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"I wasn't here," she said, "I went apartment-hunting and found a nice one, on the other side of town. We can move in tomorrow, if we like."

"Wait until day after," McDermott said, "I'll stay home and help you. The van can come in the morning and we'll be completely gone by nightfall."

"Roget," Grania said. "I burned your letters today, in case they could be used against you." They ate studge and went to bed to read until they could not keep their eyes open. He read Wodehouse and she read Simenon.

He was sitting in a room with stone walls. Light came in from a long window set deep into the stones of the west wall. He always worked in the third corner in the late afternoon. Grania knocked on the door and came in. They sat together in the fading sunlight, reading together the manuscript he had been writing. That was the first description of Waldeyer's Ring, glowing red in the darkness. Their voices were low as they spoke of his work, as if she had come in secrecy. They did not sit close together, but they were aware of the dimensions of the space between them. When it was time for her to go, he knew that he must not attempt to keep her there any longer. When the door closed behind her, he felt the life going out of the day; the sun had set and the shadows were closing in. He sat alone in the twilight for a while.

"I don't understand it," McDermott said the next morning, "we didn't do anything. We were just sitting and talking and reading the manuscript together."

"Maybe I wasn't supposed to be there at all," Grania said, "maybe that was the sin. What was I wearing?"

"One of those things," McDermott said, "something green. It might be a sack. I think that was the first time I knew you."

"What did you wear?"

"I don't remember," McDermott said, "a mantle. I wrote in the manuscript where Waldeyer's Ring was hidden—a thing I shouldn't have done, and now they are out to get us."

"That was a long time ago, by the clothes," Grania said, "How many times have they tried? Did they ever get the manuscript back?"

"I don't remember," McDermott said, "I haven't dreamed it yet. It might be dangerous if you start to dream."

"I think we were not supposed to be friends," Grania said, "and now here we are, married, and they think it's wrong."

"I think we must get married every time," McDermott said, picking up his trenchcoat; "over and over, we meet and get mar-

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ried and they can't stop it. But how does it end? That's what worries me."

"I'll see the people about the new apartment today," Grania said, "I'll tell them we'll take it. I'll call the moving van, too."

"Roget," McDermott said, taking his hat from the rack.

"Thesaurus," said Grania.

When he arrived at the office he found that Miss Bliss had girdled her loins and was determined to satisfy her curiosity.

"Good morning, Mr McDermott," she said with a glint.

"Good morning, Miss Bliss," he said, going into his office. She followed him to the door and put her feet inside so that he could not shut it without crushing her. He hung up his trenchcoat and waited for her to begin it.

"Who is Miss Thea Phlebom?" asked Miss Bliss, ready to take notes.

"I do not know, Miss Bliss," McDermott replied, sitting down at his desk and beginning to shuffle papers. "She came on business, I suppose. And now, you must excuse me. I am not to be disturbed this morning."

"Very well, Mr McDermott," Miss Bliss said, "I have never bedraggled anyone in my life, no matter what the cost!" She closed the door firmly and sniffed. He had heard that sniff before.

McDermott was able to take a table in the third corner for lunch. He stayed there for two hours, hoping to avoid Phlebom. The ruse was successful. Miss Bliss had left a memo on his desk and taken herself off to salad. The message said that Miss Phlebom would return in the P.M.

"Damn!" said McDermott. He clutched at his coat and was hurrying off, just as Miss Bliss walked in wearing her draggletailed hat.

"Does Mrs McDermott know Miss Phlebom?" she asked nastily.

"No, Mrs McDermott does not know Miss Phlebom," he replied, "Mrs McDermott does not pry into my business affairs. I have an appointment, Miss Bliss, and I will be gone for the rest of the day."

"She said she'd be back," Miss Bliss told him; "she said you'd be sorry."

"Good afternoon, Miss Bliss," McDermott said, going anyway.

"Good afternoon, Mr McDermott," she said, and sniffed as the door closed.

Home across the ivy-grown park would be the best way. As he came out of the park and started to cross the street, he saw a slender, genteel figure wearing a floppy hat, quite unsuitable for the rain, walk up the steps to the door. He knew that she could not get in without a key.

McDermott ran to the drugstore, hoping that he could call in time.

"Don't answer the doorbell," he

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cried when Grania answered, "it's her, it's Phlebom!"

"Where are you? How do you know?" Grania said softly.

"I'm at the drugstore on the corner," McDermott whispered back. "I saw her go up the steps. She couldn't catch me at the office, so now she's after you." He peered out of the glass door of the booth; the coast was clear.

"Call me back," Grania said as the doorbell rang, "don't try to come in until she's gone."

"Roget," McDermott said. "You watch, too, from the window. She's wearing a dress of poinsetta crinkle."

For some reason, they both fell asleep early that night.

He was a second time in the stone room, but this time he was alone in it. He knew that Grania would not come to knock on the door. He went out along the corridor in the twilight and came to another small room. There was a pair of sandals lying on a table in the fourth corner. As he stared at them and knew that they had been worn by Grania, he heard the funeral bells in the tower. He was not allowed to go up there. He went back to his own room and picked up the manuscript, but his eyes looked out of the narrow window into the twilight, into the silent garden.

When he woke up, Grania was crying.

"It was my funeral, wasn't it?" she asked, "I was there, I saw it too. How sad you looked!" It was the first time she had remembered a dream.

McDermott got out of bed and poured a shot of studge for each of them. They sat up in bed in the dark, listening to the rain pouring down beyond the windows.

"What did they mean by that?" Grania asked, "what do you think they are going to do?"

"They want to separate us," McDermott said, "they want to destroy us." They tried to sleep again.

"Feet in sandals," McDermott thought, closing his eyes against the dark, "prince's daughter."

"King's child, sandalwise," Grania thought, and remembered that they would move tomorrow.

It would be a relief not to see Miss Bliss today. Grania called and said that her husband was sick, but not seriously so.

"What a terrible thing, Mrs. McDermott!" exclaimed Miss Bliss; "is there anything I can do? Shall I come to help you nurse him?"

"No, for heaven's sake, Miss Bliss," said Grania, "you must stay to take care of the office!"

"Business as usual?" Miss Bliss asked bravely.

"As usual!" Grania replied with a stiff upper lip. They drank another pot of studge to celebrate the little victory.

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McDermott went to the address Grania had given him, took the key from the caretaker, and went up to wait for the movers to bring the first load. Grania came with the second, and they spent the afternoon settling in. The new apartment had painted walls instead of wallpaper, except for one section of the hall, which had a design of ivy from the floor to the ceiling. Here they put the narrow, marble-topped table, an old family piece. It is more difficult to pass marble.

That night a cold rain fell over the city and over the cars parked in the street in front of the building. They were tired from the moving and went to sleep without reading, which they had never done before.

McDermott dreamed that the hole in the fourth corner was slowly opening, framing a red glow, and filling him with such horror that Grania screamed in her sleep. She sat up in the dark, but McDermott's eyes did not open to stop the dream. Grania dressed quietly and went out into the rain, which was coming down steadily with a cold malevolence.

Wearing a sack dress, a pilgrim hat, Grania walked barefooted to Palmer's Pharmacy; it was open "night and day." Inside the Palmer himself was keeping vigil. His name was Harry Nevus and he wore a tweed suit of Harris flush.

"If you had not come to me, I would have come to you," he said.

"Have you a mixture called 'Phlebom Be-Gone'?" Grania asked.

"Yes, I have it. I can give you a year's supply, if you will pay the price," the Palmer answered, tying his beard into a true love-knot.

"Anything reasonable," said Grania.

"The price is three-fold, because of the folk, you know," he said, anxious that she should understand. "First, McDermott must give up the manuscript. It was never his, really, you know; they want it back."

"It was his," Grania said; "he wrote it."

"No, he transcribed it," the Palmer said, "and, unfortunately, he also transliterated, transmuted, and transported it on the transcendental trailroad."

"That's nonsense," said Grania.

"It really happened, once," said the Palmer. "The second fold is that McDermott must drink a pint of the 'be-gone' every night before going to bed. It will keep him from dreaming."

"Is it vile-tasting?" asked Grania.

"Tolerably vile," said the Palmer, "it's the only way to decontaminate the Ring."

"What's the third fold?" asked Grania.

"It involves a matter of some delicacy, Lady," answered the Palmer looking at the floor.

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"Frankly, your sandals aggravate the condition. The red ones. They knew the trail once in the early legends of the Ring." There was something sly about his manner.

"Thank you," said Grania; "may I have the 'be-gone' recipe now?" She took the tin with the proper label, and turned back toward the dreams.

McDermott did not wake up until she was back in bed. He did not know that she had been out; he began to tell her the dream. "A prince's daughter," he said, "in sandals."

"I know," Grania said, "I dreamed it, too."

"They say I have no right to the manuscript," McDermott argued, "but I remember writing it, so why shouldn't I keep it?"

"I think they're lying about it for reasons of their own," Grania said. "I'll make some Phlebom Be-Gone in the morning—I have the recipe."

She dreamed again, not seeing but hearing them say, "Give us Waldeyer's Ring for reasons of our own!"

McDermott woke up in the morning to find Grania staring at the fourth corner where the chair had been placed as a barrier. She had put her red leather sandals on it, and one was partly chewed.

"I thought I'd better," she said; "it kept them from coming out."

"We'll hold out a few nights longer," McDermott said at breakfast. "If they keep on, I'll give back the manuscript. But only in a dream, not to Phlebom. The coffee tastes better," he said, swallowing erp-p-p; "did you do something different?"

"New brand," Grania said. McDermott left for the streetcar, feeling more cheerful than in the past. He did not know why. Alone, like a puss in a corner, Grania began to read the recipe.

> *"Take two retorts of salt, squared to the ultimate degree, and place in saucepan with a pinch of distilled water, etc. Add shreds of last dream, mixed with be-gone in equal parts. Sic."*

The saucepan boiled and bubbled and squeeked, and Grania looked out of the window. In the dim, drizzling street below, Miss Thea Phlebom walked in her floppy hat, wet and waiting.

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Dr. Asimov is a biochemist, and this month, in a generous mood, we have given him special authorization to write about his own field—specifically, eyesotopes.

THE EVENS HAVE IT

by Isaac Asimov

SOME TIME AGO, I WAS ASKED (BY PHONE) TO WRITE AN ARTICLE on the use of radioisotopes in industry. The gentleman doing the asking waxed enthusiastic on the importance of isotopes but after a while I could stand it no more for he kept pronouncing it ISS-o-topes, with a very short "i."

Finally, I said, in the most diffident manner I could muster, "EYE-so-topes, sir," giving it a very long "i."

"No, no," he said impatiently, "I'm talking about ISS-o-topes."

And so he did, to the very end, and on subsequent phone calls too. But I fooled him. I eventually wrote the article about EYE-so-topes.

Yet it left a sore spot, for having agreed to do the article, I was forced to deal with the practical applications of isotopes, a necessity which saddened my impractical soul. I have been waiting ever since for a chance to write an article on isotopes that will have no practical angle whatever. And who but you, oh, Gentle Readers, are the obvious victims of such an undertaking.

The way in which "isotope" came into the scientific vocabulary is a little involved. After two millennia of efforts, most of the elements making up the universe had been isolated and identified. In 1869, the Russian chemist, Dmitri Ivanovich Mendeleev, arranged the known ele-

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ments in order of atomic weights and showed that a table could be prepared in which the elements, in this order, could be so placed as to make those with similar properties fall into neat columns.

By 1900, this "periodic table" was a deified adjunct of chemistry. Each element had its place in the table; while almost each place had its element. To be sure, there were a few places without elements; but that bothered no one since everyone knew that the list of known elements was incomplete. Eventually, chemists felt certain, an element would be discovered for every empty place in the table. And they were right. The last hole was filled in 1948 and additional elements were discovered beyond the last known to Mendeleev. As of now, 102 different elements are known.

After 1900, however, the much more serious converse of the situation arose. Substances were found among the radioactive breakdown products of uranium and thorium which had to be classified as new elements by 19th Century standards, since they had properties unlike those of any other elements—and yet there was no place for them in the periodic table.

Eventually, several scientists, notably the British physicist, Frederick Soddy, swallowed hard and decided that it was possible for two or more elements to occupy the same place in the periodic table. In 1913, Soddy suggested the name "isotope" for such elements, from Greek words meaning "same place."

An explanation rehabilitating the periodic table followed in due course. The New Zealand-born Ernest Rutherford had already (in 1906) shown that the atom consisted of a tiny central nucleus containing positively-charged protons and of a comparatively vast outer region in which negatively-charged electrons whirled. The number of protons at the center is equal to the number of electrons in the outskirts, and since the size of the positive electric charge on a proton (arbitrarily set at $+1$) is exactly equal to the size of the negative electric charge on an electron (which is, naturally, -1) the atom as a whole is electrically neutral.

The next step was taken by a young English physicist named Henry Gwyn-Jeffreys Moseley. By studying the wavelengths of the x-rays emitted, under certain conditions, by various elements, he was able to deduce that the total positive charge on the nucleus of each element had a characteristic value. This is called the "atomic number."

For instance, the chromium atom has a nucleus with a positive charge of 24, the manganese atom one of 25 and the iron atom one of 26. We can say then that the atomic numbers of these elements are 24, 25, and 26 respectively. Furthermore, since the positive charge is entirely due to

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the proton content of the nucleus we can say that these three elements have 24, 25, and 26 protons in their nuclei respectively, and that circling these nuclei are 24, 25, and 26 electrons, respectively.

Now throughout the 19th Century it had been held that all atoms of an element were identical. This was only an assumption but it was the easiest way of explaining the fact that all samples of an element had identical chemical properties and identical atomic weights.

But this was when atoms were viewed as hard, indivisible, featureless spheres. How did the situation stand up against the 20th Century notion that the atoms were complex collections of smaller particles?

X-ray data showed that the atomic number of an element was a matter of absolute uniformity.All atoms of a particular element had the same number of protons in the nucleus and therefore the same number of electrons in the outskirts. Through the 1920's it was shown that the chemical properties of a particular element depended on the number of electrons it contained and therefor all atoms of an element had identical chemical properties. Very good, so far.

The matter of atomic weight was not so straightforward. To begin with, it was known from the first days of the nuclear-atom theory that the nucleus must contain something other than protons. For instance—

The nucleus of the hydrogen atom was the lightest known and it had a positive charge of 1. Consequently it seemed quite reasonable, and even inevitable, to suppose that the hydrogen nucleus was made up of a single proton. It's atomic weight, which had been set equal to 1 (not quite, but just about) long before the days when atomic structure had been worked out, turned out to make sense.

Helium, on the other hand, had an atomic weight of 4. That is, its nucleus was known to be four times as massive as the hydrogen nucleus. The natural conclusion seemed to be that it must contain 4 protons. However, its atomic number, representing the positive charge on its nucleus was only 2. An equally natural conclusion from that seemed to be that the nucleus must contain only 2 protons.

With two different but natural conclusions, something had to be done. The only other subatomic particle known in the first decades of the 20th Century was the electron. Suppose then the helium nucleus contained 4 protons and 2 electrons. The atomic weight would be 4 because the electrons weighed practically nothing. The atomic number, however, would be 2 because the charge on two of the protons would be cancelled by the charge on the two electrons.

There were difficulties in this picture of the nucleus however. It gave the helium nucleus six separate particles for instance, four protons and

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two electrons, and that didn't fit in with certain other data that was being accumulated. Physicists went about biting their nails and talking in low, glum voices.

Then, in 1932, the neutron was discovered by the English physicist, James Chadwick, and it turned out that all was right with the world, after all. The neutron is equal in mass to the proton (just about) but has no charge at all. Now the helium nucleus could be viewed as consisting of 2 protons and 2 neutrons, you see. The positive charge and hence the atomic number would be 2 and the atomic weight would be 4. This would involve a total number of four particles in the helium nucleus and that fit all data.

Now how does the presence of neutrons in the nucleus of an atom affect the chemical properties? Answer, it doesn't. At least, not noticeably.

Take as an example, the copper atom. It has an atomic number of 29 so every copper atom has 29 protons in the nucleus and 29 electrons in the outer reaches. But copper has an atomic weight of (roughly) 63, so the nucleus of the copper atom must contain, in addition to 29 protons, 34 neutrons as well. The neutrons have no charge; they do not need to be balanced. The 29 electrons balance the 29 protons and, as far as they are concerned, the neutrons can go jump in the lake.

Well, then, suppose just for fun that a copper atom happened to exist with a nucleus containing 29 protons and 36 neutrons, two more neutrons, that is, than the number I suggested in the previous paragraph. Such a nucleus would still require only 29 electrons to balance the nuclear charge and the chemical properties, which depend on the electrons only, would remain the same.

In other words, if we judge by chemical properties alone, the atoms of an element need *not* be identical. The number of neutrons in the nucleus could vary all over the lot and this would make no difference chemically. Since the periodic table points out chemical similarities and since the elements are defined by their chemical properties, it means that each place in the periodic table is capable of holding a large variety of different atoms, with different numbers of neutrons, *provided* the number of protons in all those atoms is held constant.

But how does this affect the atomic weight?

Well, the two varieties of copper atoms would, naturally, be well-mixed at all times. Why not? Since they would have identical chemical properties, they would travel the same path in geochemical processes; all of them would react equally with the environment about them, go into solution and out of solution at the same time and to the same extent.

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They would be inseparable and in the end, any sample of an element found in nature, or prepared in the laboratory, would contain the same even mixture of the two copper isotopes.

In obtaining the atomic weight of an element, then, 19th Century chemists were getting the *average* weight of the atoms of that element. The average would always be the same (for anything *they* could do) but that did *not* mean that all the atoms were individually identical.

Then what happened to upset this comfortable picture once radioactivity was discovered?

Well, radioactive breakdown is a *nuclear* process, and whether it take place or not, and how quickly, and in what fashion depends on the arrangement of particles in the nucleus and has nothing to do with the electrons outside the nucleus. It follows that two atoms with nuclei containing the same number of protons but different numbers of neutrons would have identical chemical properties but different nuclear properties. It was the identical chemical properties that placed them in the same spot in the periodic table. The different nuclear properties had nothing to do with the periodic table.

But in the first decade of the 20th century, when the distinction between nuclear properties and chemical properties had not yet been made, there was this period of panic when it seemed the periodic table would go crashing.

It was easy to distinguish between two isotopes (which, you now see, simply defines two atoms with equal number of protons in their nuclei but different numbers of neutrons) if radioactivity is involved. What, however, if neither of two isotopes is radioactive? Is it even possible for there to be more than one non-radioactive isotope of a given element?

Well, if a plurality of non-radioactive isotopes of an element existed, they would differ in mass. A copper atom with 29 protons and 34 neutrons would have a "mass number" of 63, while one with 29 protons and 36 neutrons would have one of 65. (The word "atomic weight" is reserved for the average masses of naturally-occurring mixtures of isotopes of a particular element.)

In 1919, the English physicist, Francis William Aston, invented the mass spectrograph in which atoms in ionic form (that is, with one or more electrons knocked off so that each atom has a net positive charge) could be driven through a magnetic field. The ions would follow a curved path in so doing, the sharpness of the curve depending on the mass of the particular ion. Isotopes having different masses would end on different spots of a photographic plate and from the intensities of darkening, the relative quantities of the individual isotopes can be determined. For

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instance the 34-neutron copper atom makes up 70 percent of all copper atoms while the 36-neutron copper atom makes up the remaining 30 percent. This accounts for the fact that the atomic weight of copper is not exactly 63, but is actually 63.54.

To distinguish isotopes, chemists make use of mass numbers. A copper atom with 29 protons and 34 neutrons has a mass number of 29 plus 34, or 63, and can therefore be referred to as "copper-63," while one with 29 protons and 36 neutrons would be "copper-65." In written form, chemical symbols plus superscripts are used, as Cu^{63} and Cu^{65}.

By this system, only the total number of protons plus neutrons are given. Chemists shrug this off. They know the atomic number of each element by heart (or they can look it up when no one's watching them) and that gives them the number of protons in the nucleus. By subtracting the atomic number from the mass number, they get the number of neutrons.

But the heck with that. For purposes of this article, I am going to write my isotopes with proton and neutron numbers both clearly stated, thus: copper = 29/34 and copper = 29/36. If I want to refer to both of them I will write: copper =29/34,36. Fair enough?

With this background, we can now look at the isotopes more closely. For instance, we can divide them into three varieties. First, there are the radioactive ones that break down so rapidly (lasting no longer than a few million years at most) that any which exist now have arisen in the comparatively near past as a result of some nuclear reaction, either in nature or in the laboratory. I will call these the "unstable isotopes." Although over a thousand of these are known, each one exists in such fantastically small traces (if at all) that they make themselves known only to the nuclear physicist and his instruments.

Secondly, there are isotopes which are radioactive but which break down so slowly (in hundreds of millions of years at the very least) that those which exist today have existed at least since the original formation of the earth. Each of them, despite its continuous breakdown, exists in nature in quantities that would make it detectable by old-fashioned 19th Century chemical methods. I will call these the "semi-stable isotopes."

Finally there are the isotopes which are not at all radioactive or are so feebly radioactive that even our most sensitive instruments cannot detect it. These are the "stable isotopes."

In this article I shall concern myself only with the semi-stable and stable isotopes.

No less than 19 of the 102 elements known today possess only un-

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stable isotopes and therefore exist in nature either in insignificant traces or not at all. These are listed in Table 1. Notice that all but two of these elements exist at the very end of the known list of elements, with atomic numbers running from 84 to 102. The only elements not on the list, within that stretch, are elements number 90 (thorium) and 92 (uranium), both of which, you will note, have an even atomic number. On the other hand, there are two elements in the list with atomic numbers below that range, elements number 43 (technetium) and 61 (promethium), both with odd atomic numbers.

This means that there are exactly 83 elements which possess at least one stable or semi-stable isotope and which therefore occur in reasonable quantities on earth. (There is no stable or semi-stable isotope that does

Table 1——Elements Without Stable or Semi-Stable Isotopes

Element	Atomic Number	Element	Atomic Number
Technetium	43	Plutonium	94
Promethium	61	Americium	95
Polonium	84	Curium	96
Astatine	85	Berkelium	97
Radon	86	Californium	98
Francium	87	Einsteinium	99
Radium	88	Fermium	100
Actinium	89	Mendelevium	101
Protactinium	91	Nobelium	102
Neptunium	93		

not occur in nature in reasonable quantities.) Some of these elements possess only one such isotope, some two, some three, and so on.

Now it is an odd thing that although every chemistry textbook I have ever seen always lists the elements, no book I have ever seen ever lists the isotopes in any systematic way.

For instance I have never seen *anywhere* a complete list of all those elements possessing but a single stable or semi-stable isotope. I will prepare such a list and here it is in Table 2. It is my gift to you and, as far as I know, this listing of solo isotopes is unique. (I distinguish a semi-stable isotope, by the way, by the use of an asterisk after the neutron number.)

There are twenty-one elements with one stable or semi-stable isotope apiece, and you will notice that in every case but two (beryllium and thorium, first and last in the list) the solo isotopes have an odd number

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Table 2——Elements With One Stable or Semi-Stable Isotope

Element	Proton/Neutron	Element	Proton/Neutron
Beryllium	4/5	Rhodium	45/58
Fluorine	9/10	Iodine	53/74
Sodium	11/12	Cesium	55/78
Aluminum	13/14	Praseodymium	59/82
Phosphorus	15/16	Terbium	65/94
Scandium	21/24	Holmium	67/98
Manganese	25/30	Thulium	69/100
Cobalt	27/32	Gold	79/118
Arsenic	33/42	Bismuth	83/126
Yttrium	39/50	Thorium	90/142*
Niobium	41/52		

*semi-stable

of protons in the nucleus and an even number of neutrons. These are the "odd/even isotopes."

Let's next list the elements that possess two stable or semi-stable isotopes—in Table 3. This list includes 23 elements of which 20 possess odd numbers of protons.

Table 3——Elements With Two Stable or Semi-Stable Isotopes

Element	Proton/Neutrons	Element	Proton/Neutrons
Hydrogen	1/0,1	Silver	47/60,62
Helium	2/1,2	Indium	49/64,66*
Lithium	3/3,4	Antimony	51/70,72
Boron	5/5,6	Lanthanum	57/61*,62
Carbon	6/6,7	Europium	63/88,90
Nitrogen	7/7,8	Lutetium	71/104,105*
Chlorine	17/18,20	Tantalum	73/107*,108
Vanadium	23/27*,28	Rhenium	75/110,112*
Copper	29/34,36	Iridium	77/114,116
Gallium	31/38,40	Thallium	81/122,124
Bromine	35/44,46	Uranium	92/143*,146*
Rubidium	37/48,50*		

*semi-stable

If you look at the first three tables, you will see that of the 51 known elements with odd atomic numbers, 11 possess no stable or semi-stable

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isotopes, 19 possess just one stable or semi-table isotope and 20 possess just two. The total comes to 50.

There is one and only one element of odd atomic number left unaccounted for and if you follow down the lists, the missing element turns out to be number 19, which is potassium. Potassium has three stable or semi-stable isotopes and I'll list it here without giving it the dignity of a table all to itself: Potassium-19/20,21*,22.

Of these, the semi-stable potassium-19/21* (the lightest of all the semi-stable isotopes) makes up only one atom in every ten thousand of potassium, so that this element just *barely* has more than two isotopes.

The fifty-one elements with odd atomic number contain, all told, 62 different stable or semi-stable isotopes. Of these, 53 contain an even number of neutrons, so that there are 53 odd/even stable or semi-stable isotopes in existence. These can be broken up into 50 stable ones and 3 semi-stable (rubidium-37/50*, indium 49/66*, and rhenium-75/112*).

There are only 9 stable or semi-stable isotopes of the atoms with odd atomic number that possess an odd number of neutrons as well. Table 4

Table 4——The Stable or Semi-Stable Odd/Odd Isotopes

Element	Proton/Neutron
Hydogen	1/1
Lithium	3/3
Boron	5/5
Nitrogen	7/7
Potassium	19/21*
Vanadium	23/27*
Lanthanum	57/61*
Lutetium	71/105*
Tantalum	73/107*

*semi-stable

contains a complete list of all the "odd/odd isotopes", that are stable or semi-stable, in existence.

As you see, of these 9, fully 5 are semi-stable. This means that only 4 completely stable odd/odd isotopes exist in the universe. Of these, the odd/odd hydrogen-1/1 is outnumbered by the odd/even hydrogen-1/0 (I am calling zero an even number, if you don't mind) ten thousand to one. The odd/odd lithium-3/3 is outnumbered by the odd/even lithium-3/4 by thirteen to one, and the odd/odd boron 5/5 is outnumbered

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by the odd/even boron 5/6 by four to one. So three of the four stable odd/odd isotopes form minorities within their own elements.

This leaves nitrogen-7/7, an odd/odd isotope which is not only compltely stable but which makes up 99.635 percent of all nitrogen atoms. It is in this respect, the oddest of all the odd/odds.

What about the elements of even atomic number?

There the situation is reversed. Only eight of the elements of even atomic number have no stable or semi-stable isotopes and all of those are in the region beyond atomic number 83 where no fully stable and almost no semi-stable isotopes exist. What's more, the three semi-stable isotopes that do exist in that region all belong to elements of even atomic number.

There are two other elements of even atomic number with but a single stable or semi-stable isotope and three with but two stable isotopes. You can pick all these up in the tables already presented.

This leaves 39 of the 51 elements of even atomic number, all possessing more than two stable isotopes. One of them, tin, possesses no less than ten stable isotopes. I will not tabulate these elements in detail.

Instead, I will point out that there are two varieties of isotopes where elements of even atomic number are involved. There are isotopes with odd numbers of neutrons ("even/odd") and those with even numbers ("even/even").

We can summarize the data on stable and semi-stable isotopes as in Table 5.

Table 5——Varieties of Isotopes

	Stable	Semi-Stable	Total
Even/Even	164	3	167
Even/Odd	55	2	57
Odd/Even	50	3	53
Odd/Odd	4	5	9
Total	273	13	
		Grand Total	286

In sheer numbers of isotopes, the even/even group is preponderant making up 60 percent of the total. The preponderance is even greater in mass.

Among the 43 elements of even atomic number that possess stable or semi-stable isotopes, only one lacks an even/even isotope. That is beryl-

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lium, with but one stable or semi-stable isotope, beryllium-4/5, which is even/odd.

Of the 42 others, there is not one case in which the even/even isotopes do not make up most of the atoms. The even/odd isotope which is most common within its own element is platinum-78/117, which makes up one-third of all platinum atoms. Where an element of even atomic number has more than one even/odd isotope (tin has three) all of them together sometimes do even better. The record is the case of xenon-54/75 and senone-54/77 which together make up almost 48 percent of all xenon atoms. In no case do the even/odd isotopes top the 50 percent mark, except in the case of beryllium, of course.

What's more, the even/odd isotopes do best just in those elements which are least common. Platinum and xenon are among the rarest of all the elements with stable or semi-stable isotopes. It is precisely in the most common elements, that the even/even isotopes are most predominant.

This shows up when we consider the structure of the earth's crust. I once worked out its composition in isotope varieties and this is the result:

even/even	—	85.63 percent
even/odd	—	13.11 percent
odd/even	—	1.25 percent
odd/odd	—	0.01 percent

Almost 99 percent of the earth's crust is made up of the elements with even atomic numbers. And if the entire earth is considered, the situation is even more extreme. In last months' article, "Recipe for a Planet," I pointed out that six elements made up 96 percent of the globe, these being iron, oxygen, magnesium, silicon, sulfur and nickel. Every one of these is an element of even atomic number. I estimate that the globe we live on is 96 percent even/even, with the rest almost all even/odd.

Which is a shame, in a way. As a long-time science fiction enthusiast and practicing non-conformist, I have always had a sneaking sympathy for the odd/odd.

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It was said in the countryside that the village was haunted, and Barin thought it might make a magazine article. But when he met the girl whose face was identical with that on his old cameo, everything somehow shifted for him . . . and the village pressed in. . . .

THE HAUNTED VILLAGE

by Gordon R. Dickson

He came to the hill overlooking the village and braked to a halt. Below him the still town lay, caught like a mirage of the hot air in a shallow cup of the enforested earth. He stared at it as he might have stared at a mirage, not quite certain even now as to how he had found it, for the instructions of the boy at the filling station had been vague and he had seen no one along the way who could give him directions. He had taken County Road number twelve and hunted at random through the small, twisting and rutted trails of dirt that snaked back from it among the pines and birch. Now, as twilight was dimming the hollows with the long rays of a red sunset glancing across the rolling hills of soft, glaciated earth, he had come upon it.

He looked down. In the still, late afternoon, the heat waves still beat and shimmered in the narrow streets and above the dark housetops, giving the town a twisting, insubstantial look. Still as a dream, it lay; and no people were visible about it.

He released the brakes and the car rolled forward down the hill, and the first houses, building quickly to a wall on either side of his car, trapped the sound of his car's motor, and magnified it, so that it seemed to clamor in the stillness. He went slowly, searching for a stopping place, until he saw to his right a high, weathered building of brown clapboard with three steps leading up to a dusty porch that bore a HOTEL sign upon its overhang. He stopped his car beside the porch and got out.

A tall dark man with grey eyes large in a thin face appeared out of the porch's deeper shadow, walking toward him.

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"Can I help you?" he asked. His voice was deep but muted, as if a sort of weary sadness in him made it a special effort to speak.

"Why, yes," said Barin, mounting the three steps. "I'm looking for a room."

"Oh," said the tall man. You'll have to ask inside, then."

He waited until Barin had passed him, then followed half a step behind. And Barin thought he felt the slight breath of a sigh on the back of his neck, but it was so light he could not be sure.

He opened the door and stepped into a dim lobby, lit only by the fading light from a bay window. To the left a shadowed passage led away into the gloomy depths of the hotel and about the lobby heavy leather chairs sat cracked and withdrawn. Ahead was the desk. He walked toward it, the tall man behind him.

"Mikkelson?" it was a heavy voice from behind the desk, hoarse and mechanical as the grating of a spade on concrete.

"There's a guest," answered the tall man from behind Barin's shoulder, in his sad, tired voice.

Beyond the counter of the desk, a cubbyhole reached back into obscurity. At the counter, a pale patch of light from the distant window fell on the grained wood and the stiff white pages of an open guest book—just turned, evidently, to a new page, for there were no signatures upon it.

There was the squeak of a chair from the darkness and the heavy, creaking steps of a large man; a thick form loomed up out of the cubbyhole to stand with belly pressed against the worn inner edge of the counter. Barin looked into a wide face, the face of a man past middle age, heavy-lipped and broad-nosed, above a thick, coarse body loosened only slightly from a younger strength.

"For how long?" The hoarse voice was now directed at Barin.

"A couple of days—maybe three." Again Barin thought he caught the trailing wisp of a sigh from the man behind him. He added quickly, to forestall questions, "I'm a photographer. A writer. I'm doing a piece on the woods up here. I'd like to explore a bit—for a day or two."

"Sign." One thick hand swiveled the guest book toward him. Another passed him the stub of a pencil on the end of a string. He took it and signed. He laid it down and looked up into the face of the man behind the desk.

"I'll be eating my meals in town," he said. "Any idea where —" He left the question hanging, but the man behind the desk did not take it up and a long silence drew itself out between them.

"Certainly you—Rosach—" The voice of the tall man again.

"We can take care of you," said Rosach, abruptly. "Not now. Too late. Breakfast."

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"Oh," said Barin; and he tried to sound disappointed, although he did not feel hungry. "Any place else in town?"

"No." Rosach reached under the counter and produced a key.

"Up there," he said, jerking a thumb to his left. "Second door on the right."

Barin turned and looked, seeing what he had not noticed before, a narrow stairway that led up and back from beside the desk.

"Thank you," he said, taking the cold metal of the key into the palm of his hand. He picked up the suitcase he had brought in with him and started up. At the turn of the stairs, he hesitated for a second and looked back. He could see the two faces, the heavy and the sad, upturned to him, caught in the patch of light from the desk and watching after him.

He went on up the stairs, emerging at the top into a long, narrow corridor, lit at the far end by a window which still gave on the fading sky. He moved down it, his shoes giving off no sound against the hall carpet. And, as he went, a girl emerged from one of the rooms farther down the hall and came toward him.

She was dressed in a simple, loose dress of some dark color and the blackness of her hair was gathered together in a bun at the back of her head. Although she could not avoid seeing him, she gave no sign of it and came toward him, looking through and past him, carrying some towels over her arm.

He reached his door before he met her; and turned to insert the key in the lock. It was his intention to stop her as she passed, to ask her some small question about the bedsheets or the location of the bathroom. But her indifference to his presence made him hesitate; and he stepped back out of her way, as her dress passed him.

In the light of the distant window her face stood out sharp and clear. It was unadorned and serious, the pale, white skin thinly stretched over the delicate bones of the face, the lips soft and straight and with two slight shadows under the narrow protrusion of her cheekbones.

He saw her in profile as she went by; and his breath caught, because for a second the shadow below the near cheekbone was gone, the graceful line of the narrow jaw, the smooth, high forehead, outlined against the dark wall opposite—and it was as if he gazed at his secret cameo.

He woke to lethargy, and gazed dully about the dingy room, wondering at himself and his whereabouts in that little uncertainty that always followed his wakening.

He must have gone to bed immediately on entering his room the evening before, because all he could remember were the wild fan-

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tasies of his dreams—his dreams about the girl who resembled exactly that cameo about which no one in the world had known, but himself.

It was a cameo he had stolen from a house locked up for the summer, back when he had been a boy. He had kept it secretly to himself and woven about it dark dreams of a strange love of the flesh. He still had it, locked in his safety deposit box, back in the city. Not even Ellen knew about it—Ellen, whom he had now decided to marry, just before he had slipped away on this final trip. It belonged to that dark side of him that he intended to bury forever.

Now there was no thought of Ellen, or the magazine article he had come up here to do. A sullen fire burned in him. Before it, the life he had envisioned with Ellen, and his work, were darkly shadowed. He had come up here on a hint, a breath of rumor from the country about this village. The people outside it considered it to be haunted in some strange way—haunted, in this day and age! He had laughed. But it had attracted him. A good chance, he had thought, for a humorous article on back-country superstitions. Now, he was no longer interested. It was the girl that demanded all his attention, the girl in the corridor.

He washed and shaved himself quickly in the veined washbowl of the bathroom down the hall, dressed and went downstairs. Behind the desk, the unchanging darkness seemed vacant of all life. He hunted by himself for the dining room and found it at the end of the passageway he had noticed when he had first stepped in. A small room with three square tables and a row of windows along one wall.

He sat down and rang the little bell that stood with its dull silver gleaming the center of the white and threadbare tablecloth. The tiny tinkle sounded in the room and echoed away through the half-open door that led beyond, he surmised, to the kitchen. He lit a cigaret, and waited.

It would, he thought, looking out the window, be another hot day. The haze was already stirring the air above the street; and the hot glare of the sun, reaching him through the glass, was no aid in rousing him from the lethargy with which he had awakened, but reached into him with smouldering sullenness and stirred something thick and hot within the animal part of him. He felt at once dull and eager, with the feverish urge to concupiscence induced by sickness and being long in bed. The smoke from his cigaret went nowhere, but coiled about him, hanging in the still air; and he waited impatiently for his service.

Paced footsteps sounded at last from beyond the door. The girl of the corridor came through its open-

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ing and up to his table. Now, in the strong sunlight from the windows, he could see that her dress was grey, but her hair was as black as ever.

"What would you like?" she said.

Now that the question was asked, he found that no more than on the preceeding evening had he any desire for food. But he was committed to the ritual of eating breakfast by his demands of yesterday; and moreover, he wanted to prolong his contact with this girl.

"What's your name?" he asked, smiling up at her.

"Dineen," she said, without change of expression. "What would you like?"

As she stood there, attendant and silent, her perfect passivity touched sudden flame from the heat within him, like spontaneous combustion in a compost heap. So sharp was the chemical change that he felt his face cool with the shock; and to cover it up, spoke quickly.

"Bacon and eggs. Anything."

She turned and went out, the click of her footsteps fading away behind the door. He sank back into the smouldering of his lethargy.

It was some minutes later when she returned; and he looked at the platter in her hands, startled to remember what he had been waiting for. Picking up his fork, he felt a slight twinge of revulsion from the food. She turned to go.

"Dineen," he said.

She turned, calm and unsurprised. He searched for the color of her eyes; but even in the light from the window, this escaped him.

"Yes?" she said.

"I don't know this town of yours," he said with his lips, still watching her. "How do I get out into the woods?"

"Take any road," she said.

"Any road?"

"Yes." She waited a second further, but the sound of her voice went flying away and away into nothingness in his head, as if it would echo into eternity; and he did not say anything more. When he recovered from the sound of it, she had gone.

He sat, wrung with a desire to follow her that was countered by a feverish inertia like that of the weakly sick. After a little while he turned to his plate and ate automatically, not tasting the food, but feeling it soft and slab-like upon his tongue. It was nothing, but it woke him up. He finished his cold coffee and got up.

He went out; down the dark passageway, through the front door and out into the sunlight. Its glare seized him, blinding and baffling him, and he realized with a start that the morning was already gone. It was high noon. He walked off through the streets at random.

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He stood in the hills surrounding the town and looked down on the hot gleam of its rooftops. The air was motionless and under the glare of light, the dancing heat-waves seemed to cause the whole conglomeration of buildings to seethe and boil. The forest about it stood like a protecting rampart. Its coolness held him. It smelled cleanly of natural scents, like his Ellen. And he was reminded of her again and he felt the urge to give up the notion of work here, to pack and drive, and so slip back into the protection of the outside world.

But the impulse was like the distant twinge of a nerve, the prick of a dentist's needle in an area where the novocaine has already gone to work. For, superimposed on Ellen's image came the face of his cameo, the face of Dineen. And the wish to break through the invisible barrier of reticence he felt in the girl, returned to him again and again, like the pounding of a drum, until he could feel the feverish thump and plunge of his heart, beating in unison with it.

It was the town, he thought. The town guarded her. The unanimity of its conclave of dusty streets, through which he had walked on his way just now to these hills, its solitary figures, just out of hailing distance, its still houses with their blank and eyeless windows, these walled him off from Dineen. He had felt the alien spirit of this place from the first. He had recognized it at the hotel desk and when she had spoken in the hotel dining room. He had felt it on his way to here, passing the houses. Whole and alive, they had stood, lining either side of his way, their windows unbroken and the half-glimpsed hint of a limp curtain here and there behind a glassy edge. But silent, silent—in tenanted silence. He had tried vainly to see woman and children peeping from those dead glass eyes.

It was the town, he thought, climbing higher on a little knoll for a better view. It was not Dineen that held him at a distance, but the town. Once within its walls of suspicion and distrust—they were small-town, country people and they undoubtedly knew how the rest of the countryside spoke of them—he would find himself the stronger of the two of them. He could break through to her core, inside.

He struck his right fist suddenly into the palm of his left hand. Of course! The town distrusted him because he was an outsider. They thought he had come in an evening, and would leave in a morning. As long as they believed this, their reticence would hold. But undermine that—and the wall of their defenses would come tumbling down. He would be one of them, not one against many, but one against the one that was

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Dineen; and in that contest he felt sure he would be superior. That was the answer, to announce that he was staying, that he would be among them henceforward and that there was no point in their standing aloof, for he was in their midst and of them.

So, thinking this, the old emotion of the cameo came upon him, and in the still glow of the sun and the silent wood a haze seemed to form about him so that he felt himself a dream moving in a world of dreams; and near and far off, past, present and future, were all no more than things and shadows of his mind. And, turning, he went back down the slope and once more into the village.

The streets closed once again about him. He drifted on down their dusty sidewalks, past the soundless houses and dead stores. They seemed not so remote now. The figures of townspeople swam in and out of his sight, half a block and a block away. He wandered at random, half-expecting at any moment to come upon Dineen; until, turning around a corner no different from the rest, he came suddenly upon a small blind alley, at the far end of which a tiny old woman, bent and wrinkled, hunched and spat at the sight of him.

"Go away!" she screamed in a cracked voice that struck distantly upon his ears. "Get away from here!"

He looked at her dreamily as she crouched against the wall of the alley's far end. He thought of the answer that should reassure her.

"No, no," he said. "I'm a new neighbor. Just moved in. You should get to know me."

He stepped forward and reached out his hand to her; but she cowered away from him still, and went on screaming, "Get away! Get away!" in her thin, ancient voice.

"Is that any way to treat the citizens?" he said, smiling at her. "A fellow citizen?"

"Get away!" she cried. *"Help!"*

"But I'm settling down here," he said, walking toward her. "I'll buy a house—pay taxes, you know? I'll be settling down with one of your local girls. When Dineen and I—" he hesitated suddenly at the word *married,* as if the crazy old woman would pounce on it and twist it into something mocking or obscene.

"—settle things," he finished, lamely.

She screamed more loudly, a long and piercing wail. He stood right in front of her now, his hands outstretched. And suddenly he was conscious of movement behind him and Mikkelson, the tall, sad man, pushed past his shoulder to take the old woman by her monkey hands and lead her past him and away to a door in one wall of the alley that opened on blackness and took her in.

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The door closed and Mikkelson turned back to face Barin.

"She's old," he said in his tired voice, "and not quite right, sometimes."

"I guessed something like that," said Barin. "You know, I was only trying to be friendly. I've just been thinking of staying. Settling down here—" He thought he saw the shadow of a frown beginning to form on the tall man's face. "—Of course, you're right, she's not quite —"

He hesitated. Mikkelson turned and began to lead the way out of the alley. Barin followed, feeling a sudden spurt of anger.

"She ought to be in an institution!" he said.

"Some of our people here," Mikkelson turned his head as he walked, "have ideas brought over from the old country. They don't believe in sending away relatives. They keep them to themselves, in some dark room."

The words struck Barin with an odd ring; but they were back out on the street now and he saw a chance to show his agreement with the spirit of the local people.

"And why not?" he said. "Probably the best way, when you come right down to it. Are there many around here like her?"

"A few," said Mikkelson. "Some. Maybe more than you'd think—by outside standards."

"Oh, not me," said Barin. He made an open gesture with his hand. "It's like the stories about this place. I'll be honest with you. The rest of the country around here seems to think you people are haunted. In fact, that's the article I actually came up here to do. Quaint country superstitions, you know. Well, very possibly it's this practice with the old and senile that's given them that notion about you. After all, it's all relative. Who can tell? Who can set the standards of sanity or insanity? Looked at from one point of view everyone is a little insane. Or everyone is sane."

Mikkelson turned his large eyes upon him.

"That's true," said the tall man. "I supposse you lost your way?"

"Why, yes. That's what happened," said Barin. "Your streets —and I was so busy thinking I didn't notice where I was going." He smiled at Mikkelson. "It was quite easy."

"Very easy," said Mikkelson, "even in a small town like this." He pointed up the street. "There's your hotel, now. I have to turn off here."

Barin looked up and saw the porch and sign of the hotel half a block away. He turned to thank Mikkleson, but the tall man had already turned and was striding off down a street to Barin's right.

Barin went on to the hotel.

In the dining room that evening, he caught Dineen by the

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wrist after she had brought him his dinner coffee and held her.

"Sit down," he begged.

She looked from his face to his hand, his long fingers enclosing her slim wrist with the white hand limp beyond it. She looked back with no expression on her face and sat down. When he released her arm she drew it to her and out of reach below the edge of the tabletop.

"I love you," he said.

"No," she said, and shook her head.

"You don't understand," he said, leaning toward her. "You think it's impossible, the sort of thing that happens in movies, that I could come in from nowhere and see you once and fall in love. But it *is* possible. It is!"

She shook her head again.

"Listen," he said, putting his face close to hers. "If love is something different to you, it can happen this way. You think I'm just talking—that I'll be going away again. But I won't. I've been looking for a place to settle; and I like it here. You think about that." He put his hands under her elbows and lifted, so that she got to her feet. He pushed her toward the kitchen door. "Go on, think about it."

She went off, turning about like a sleepwalker. He watched her go.

The next morning, the waters of sleep were turgid and heavier, harder to brush from him. He woke to a feeling of heavy dullness and indifference so deep it seemed to hold his body in near paralysis.

He rose and dressed with great effort. Nor, this morning, could he bring himself to make the effort of shaving and washing. Dully, he went out of his room and downstairs.

The front door of the hotel opened under the pressure of the palms of his hands and he stepped out again into the sunlight. He went down the three steps to the sidewalk; and, turning right, began to walk aimlessly through the town.

There was a thought, vague but insistent in his mind, that he should look up some local owner or dealer in real estate. With someone like that, he could go through the motions of renting, or —why not, he had the money— buying a place. But he hesitated at asking directly from Rosach or Dineen where such a man could be found. Dineen might not believe it.

It would be better to stumble across someone like that on his own.

For the first time, now, having walked a little ways, he lifted his eyes from the greyish pavement of the sidewalk that streamed slowly past his plodding feet, and looked around. This day, it

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seemed, there were more people moving about the village, as if they were all losing their fear of his strangeness. He saw them on every street he turned into; standing, walking or talking, although those who talked were always at such a distance that the sound of their voices did not reach him; and on several occasions, he could see through some magnification of the haze their very lips moving, but could not catch a word.

And of the others, there were many within easy hailing distance, across the street or a few feet away, up on wide, shadowy verandas; but for some reason, he had a disinclination to call out to them, as he might have on his first day here. It seemed to him now that so abrupt and unwarranted an action might easily shatter the fragile web he was weaving to bind himself into the structure of their isolation.

Yet he must ask directions.

He looked around. On a nearby veranda, a woman was sweeping listlessly at the dust on the painted surface of the boards. He took his politeness in both hands, and turned in through the gate in the wrought iron fence that guarded the parched and dying front lawn.

The click of the metal gate, opening and closing, announced his coming. The woman looked up. Her broom stopped and she stood waiting in silence, defensively, for him to come up.

His feet rang hard on the concrete of the walk and hollow on the wooden steps to the porch level.

"Pardon me," he said. "But I'm looking for a local real estate agent. You couldn't tell me where to find one, could you?"

She looked at him with a face scoured of character and expression by long years of hard work and stifled thought.

"I don't know." Her voice was rusty and uncertain.

"Who might know?" Barin asked. "Do you know somebody who would be able to tell me?"

"I don't know," she repeated dully. "My man, you might ask him."

"And where would I find him?"

"I don't know," she repeated for the third time, wearily. Her hand made a feeble little gesture of vague indication. "Out, someplace. Downtown."

She stopped. Barin waited for her to continue, but she seemed to have forgotten his presence. She made some small, aimless movements with the broom as if she would take up her sweeping again.

"What's his name?" asked Barin, finally.

"His name?" She said, lifting her head, and hesitated. "George. George Monk," she said at last.

"Thank you." Barin gave her a small, half-wave with his hand and turned, going down the walk and out again past the click of the

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ate, into the street. As he walked way, he turned once briefly to ook back over his shoulder. She ad gone back to her sweeping.

He walked toward what he took be the business section. As the adowed houses gave way to the usty panes of the store fronts, he ame out on a street which was bviously the main one of the vil-ge, three blocks of brick and lapboard buildings with high lank windows on the second ory and square shop windows elow. Under the baking sun, on his street no one stirred.

He looked about and turned at andom to the nearest store, which ad HARDWARE painted in fad-d yellow letters above the store ront. He opened the windowless oor and went in.

Above his head a bell chimed. little man came to meet him etween narrow counters piled igh with metal goods and pieces f household equipment.

"Yes?" he said. "Yes, what do ou want?"

"I'm looking for a George Monk," said Barin. "Do you know where I can find him?"

The little man peered up at Barin through rimless, glinting lasses. His voice was dusty and rackled like old paper that shat-ers when crumpled.

"George Monk?"

"Yes."

The little man laughed like eaves rustling across concrete.

"He's dead. George Monk's dead."

"His wife—" Barin began.

"His wife!" The little man snorted thinly through his small nostrils. "You've been talking to his wife, have you?"

"Well, I didn't know," said Barin. "I wanted a real estate agent."

"Real estate?" The hardware man looked up and struck the palms of his hands together. "Good. Good! There'll be a boom yet, you wait and see. Were you wanting to speculate?"

"No," said Barin. "I just wanted a place."

"Oh!" he chuckled. "A place. That's good. That's fine."

"I'm thinking of settling down here—" the words were a little hard, making their way past Barin's throat. "I might marry. People do, you know." He tried to give his last words a sly twist, as if joking. Instead they sounded ominous in his own ears. The little man did not seem to notice.

"Well now," he said. "Well, now, *I* have a place. A fine place just above the store here. That might be just the thing now, don't you think?"

Barin looked around the ancient dirtiness of the store. It was not attractive. But upstairs it might be better, and beggars could not be choosers, and he wanted to rent something to convince Dineen he was serious.

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"All right," he said. "If you'd like to let me look at it—"

"Absolutely, absolutely. This way." The hardware man turned and led the way to the store's back, and up a dark staircase to a rickety landing and narrow door. He threw the door open and ushered Barin through it.

"A fine, big place," he said.

Barin walked away from him, through the bare, unfurnished rooms and to the windows in front overlooking the main street. The sunlight slanted through the windows, throwing strong shadows on the floor but without lighting the inside clearly. Standing in the light-glare and breathing the dead, unmoving air, Barin felt coming on him once again the haziness that he had felt on the hill overlooking the town. The walls about him seemed to stretch away to infinity, but at the same time to close about him, so that he felt himself locked like a fly between two panes of glass, caught by the unseen, prisoned-in transparency.

"A fine, big room. An excellent room," the hardware man was chuckling at his elbow; and he, turning, sealed the bargain, paying his fee, whatever the little man asked; and so, not listening to the squeaks and mutterings of the other, turned and went down the stairs and away into the streets of the town. But all in daze, all in a dream, all under the cloak of unreality.

How long this particular fit lasted, he found himself unable to estimate, as he sat on the grass later in the day, opposite a boy perhaps seven or eight years old perched on the pediment of a stone lion in a tiny park. Thin and close-hunched in khaki shorts and a striped t-shirt faded from much washing, the boy was coloring with crayons the faces of pictures in a coloring book. Barin watched, absorbed, as the boy worked.

"How long will it take?" Barin asked finally, breaking the silence.

"As many days as there are pictures in the book," said the boy. And he held it up to show Barin.

"You see," he said, "everything has to be done just right. Once I make a mistake, there's no fixing it. If the red happens to go just a bit over a line into the blue, the line gets spoiled. When I was just a baby, I used to spoil a lot of pictures. But now I know when you color one, it's for good, and I never make any mistakes."

"I like to color pictures," said Barin, dreamily.

"Then you got to find your own book," said the boy, seriously without raising his eyes from the page on which he was working. "But remember, it has to be perfect."

He became completely absorbed in his coloring; and, after watching for a little while longer, Barin left him.

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The day was fading when Barı came back at last to the hotel. t was the same hour of the afteroon on which he had driven into he town, two days before. The un smouldered low on the pines f the western hill tops and the obby of the hotel, when he enered it, was stifled in gloom. The everish after-effects of his dream- t was still on him; but in spite f it he felt strong now with the nemory of his day's accomplishnent, and he strode straight to he desk.

In the dark depths behind it, losach stirred, a deeper shadow.

"Yes?" his voice came grating.

"I just thought I'd tell you I'll e leaving tomorrow," Barin said. I'm going to stay a while in town ere. I thought I'd settle down nd write. I've rented a place, bove the hardware store."

Rosach grunted.

"I'll move early in the morng," Barin leaned a little forward ver the counter, trying to make ut the expression of the hotel nan's face. "I think I'll go to bed arly, now. I'm not feeling so well. Vould you mind sending Dineen p with a glass of hot milk for ne?"

Again Rosach grunted, like ome wild pig back in a thicket. t was impossible to tell whether e agreed or disagreed; and Barin, esitating at repeating his ques- ion, turned slowly away and ent up the stairs.

The hall above was shadowed darkness, but his room was filled with the clear dimness of the fading twilight seen through the window. Barin lay down on top of the covers of the made bed without even taking off his shoes. The mattress, felt through the sheets and blankets, pressed hard against his back; but he lay back gratefully drugged with tiredness that seemed to clot and impede the nervous muscles of his body. He felt that he did not want to move ever again, but to continue to lie as he was for time unending. Now, indeed, he did begin to feel hot and dizzy and a little out of his head as he might be with fever. He turned his face to the closed door of his room and waited.

After a little while, there was a knock at the door.

"Come in," he said, looking away out the window.

He heard footsteps in the cadence of Dineen's walk, approaching his bed. But he kept his eyes on the glowing oblong of window until he heard the glass of milk being set down on the table beside the head of his bed. Then he spoke.

"Don't go," he said.

The sound of his own voice, bleating and strange, shocked him; and, turning his head at last, he was shocked even more by Dineen's appearance, for she had made no move to go, but stood

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with lowered head, hands limply at her side like one condemned before the executioner. For a second a thrill of pity cooled him; and then the buried heat of his desire beat up more fiercely. He took her by one still hand, swinging himself up into a sitting position on the edge of the bed. She neither stirred nor spoke.

"Dineen—" he said.

She did not move. And at that he told himself that she had already heard the news of his day's action. Rosach had told her, no doubt. There could be no other interpretation.

"Now you know," he said.

"Yes." Her voice was calm and hopeless, so that he shuddered at it while at the same time it increased his hunger and he tightened his grip on her hand, pulling her toward him. She came, neither helping nor resisting; and the weight of her body fell softly and heavily upon him, pushing him back down on the bed. The last rays of the sun through the window struck him full in the eyes, blinding him; and a surge of triumph like nothing he had ever felt before, washed through and over him.

"Dineen!" he cried wildly, putting his arms around her.

He awoke gradually, fighting returning consciousness and a feeling of growing sickness that came with it, an abiding ugliness that hung just outside the limits of his knowledge and that increasing wakefulness did nothing to dispel.

He could not remember what had happened the night before, beyond the moment of his calling Dineen's name. There was a vague feeling that nothing had happened, that after a little while she had left him with everything all inconclusive. Forcing himself up to sit on the edge of the bed, he discovered himself still fully clothed, on a bed still fully made. The memory of the evening grew more clear. No, they had done nothing; they had not even talked. She had lain in his arms like a life-size imitation of a woman, a cloth doll stuffed with sawdust—yet the memory of this, just this, was a particular horror. And now, suddenly, he remembered why. It was because, even then, even with her just like that, he had not wanted to let her go.

Now, he wanted nothing but to leave.

At any cost he wanted to pack up and get away from this place. Leave Dineen with the lie of his love and promise, leave the hardware owner with the rent money he had paid down. Leave all, leave everything, but get away before he should be tripped again, to sink once more into the particular foulness he had gone down into the night before.

He thought of Ellen now with the intensity of a drowning man.

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The image of her was a light, natural and clean as the glimmer of day, far off at the end of this dank and underground tunnel in which he was now groping. He must get back to her, he must get out, at any cost he must get out. Struggling against lethargy, spurred by the sickly fear that held him, he began to dress.

He did not have strength to pack his suitcase. He left it and went out into the hall. He came down the stairs, slowly and awkwardly, his body protesting against the dreamlike exhaustion that held him in its octopus coils. He walked heavily to the desk.

"Leaving?" said the deep, harsh voice from back in the shadows behind the desk.

"Leaving."

He echoed the word wearily. There was the creak of the chair, the heavy footsteps moving forward and Rosach emerged into the dim patch of daylight behind the counter. He looked at Barin with a hint of obscure triumph on his heavy face. He stood there.

"Well?" said Barin, with a sigh. "How much?"

"Fifteen," said Rosach. He did not refer to the guest book or any ledger; and when Barin painfully laid the bills on the counter between them, and made no effort to pick them up.

"Well—goodby," said Barin.

"Goodby," answered Rosach, still watching him without moving or altering the expression on his face.

Away in the distance, an unfamiliar sound could be heard, the rattling roar of an ancient car breasting the height above the village and starting down the street Barin had followed before.

"Goodby," repeated Barin, almost inaudibly. He turned away from the desk, picked up his suitcase and trudged toward the door. Outside the sound of the car could be heard, coming close. It moved up and stopped in front of the hotel.

He was only a few feet from the door when a patch of shadow near the dusty front window stirred and took on outline. It was Dineen, saying nothing, standing white-faced in the shadows and waiting for him.

He stopped and half-turned to her, a stumbling apology on his lips. He stepped toward her, but she faded back into the gloom, and was lost. Slowly he turned away.

Behind him, Rosach's heavy footsteps could be heard coming around the counter and toward him.

Barin's gaze went to the window and centered on the weathered convertible that had just pulled up, and on the couple, a young man and girl, who stood at the foot of the porch steps talking up to Mikkelson. For a second they struck welcomely upon Barin's

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eyes, like representatives of a wholesome world apart. And then it was as if the soft kindness of emotion was wiped away by the acid of a prejudiced and fouled appraisal. The gentle planes of the two young faces became blocky and ugly, the eyes seemed narrow, the pallor unhealthy, the lips sagging and lush and lewd under the sharply seen hairs curling from the nostrils.

They were alien—alien!

Horror mounted in Barin, and repulsion. Against his will, like a strange thing which had ceased to obey orders, he could feel his body shrinking, drawing back from the window, and his mouth opening and widening, stretching at the corners in preparation for letting out the droning, whining bleat that was mounting up from his lungs to his straining throat.

—Then a bear-like arm caught him from behind and Rosach's thick and grainy hand was over his mouth, throttling that madman's wail. He was dragged back from the window and the scene dissolved into a confusion of low voices and the pressure of holding hands as he was dragged backward through obscure corridors and black ways until he felt earth under his feet and a stable smell came up in his nostrils as the arms finally let him go—and he sank into yet greater blackness where his whirling and insane senses departed from him.

Some time afterwards, he came back to himself, lying in muck and dirt, and opened his eyes. Low voices were talking in the darkness about him like voices in a nightmare. But the blackness was relieved, for here and there a chink of light showed as through ill-fitted boards, filtering a greyness into the place. In one lighter portion of the dark, Dineen sat, on something unseen, her face half-turned to him. She sat motionless, her profile a thing of patchwork shade and shadow, like a woodcut.

"Are you awake?"

It was the voice of Rosach, above him.

"Yes," Barin whispered. But it seemed they had not heard him.

"It never happened before," clicked the voice of the hardware man. "Not like this."

"It was . . ." said Barin, and stopped.

"What?" demanded the crackling, high old voice.

"Nothing," said Barin. "Nothing—"

There were confused murmurs from above him, muted argument in which nothing was understandable.

"We have, after all, a duty," said the deep, sad voice of Mikkelson, louder than the rest.

"—And the others passed through?" asked Rosach.

"Directions," said Mikkelson, "that was all they wanted."

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"It was the others," said Barin, umbly, "those in the car . . . 's the rest of the world that aunts here.

"Shut him up!" cried the crack-ng voice, angrily.

"This place is haunted by the est of the world. Dineen!" cried arin suddenly. "Dineen, this own is haunted by the real world, n't it?"

"Yes," her voice came calmly rough the darkness. She had not oved.

"Shut her up, too!" screeched e old voice. "How can we think ith that gabbling?"

"What sin was it that—" Barin ised himself suddenly on one el-ow. "What's that smell?"

"It will be fall in a few months," id Mikkelson's voice, "and with he first snow, the roads—"

"It's goats!" screamed Barin uddenly, scrabbling to his feet. "It's a goat pen in here! You're not going to lock me up with goats—" He made a plunge into darkness, but the arms were around him again.

"There's no goats!" squawked the old voice.

"You can't fool me!" cried Barin, plunging and biting. "I won't be locked up to rot in a pen with goats. I tell you I can smell them!"

"He smells himself, now," said the voice of Rosach in Barin's ear. "Help me get the rope around him and tie him up."

Barin felt the harsh, thick fiber winding around him, but it could hardly hold him. He twisted and plunged in the darkness, butting at anything he felt close to him and bleating his terror, while his churning feet pounded and galloped to nowhere on the hard packed dirt of the ground, like hooves.

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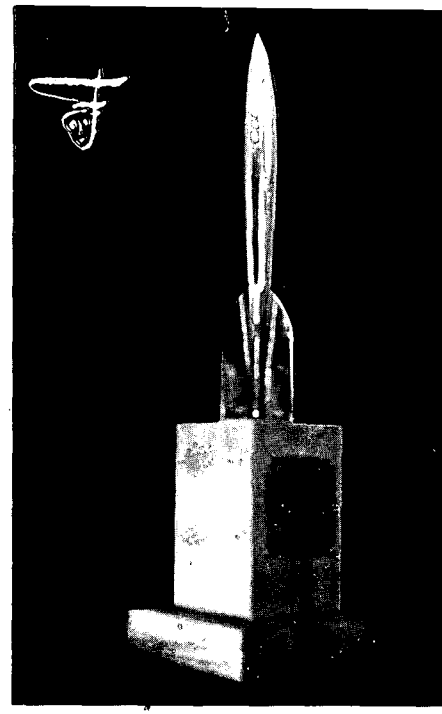

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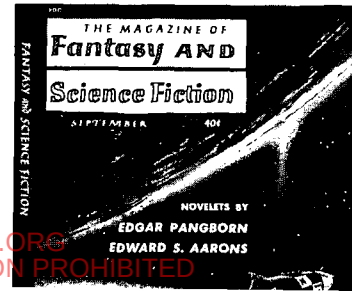

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